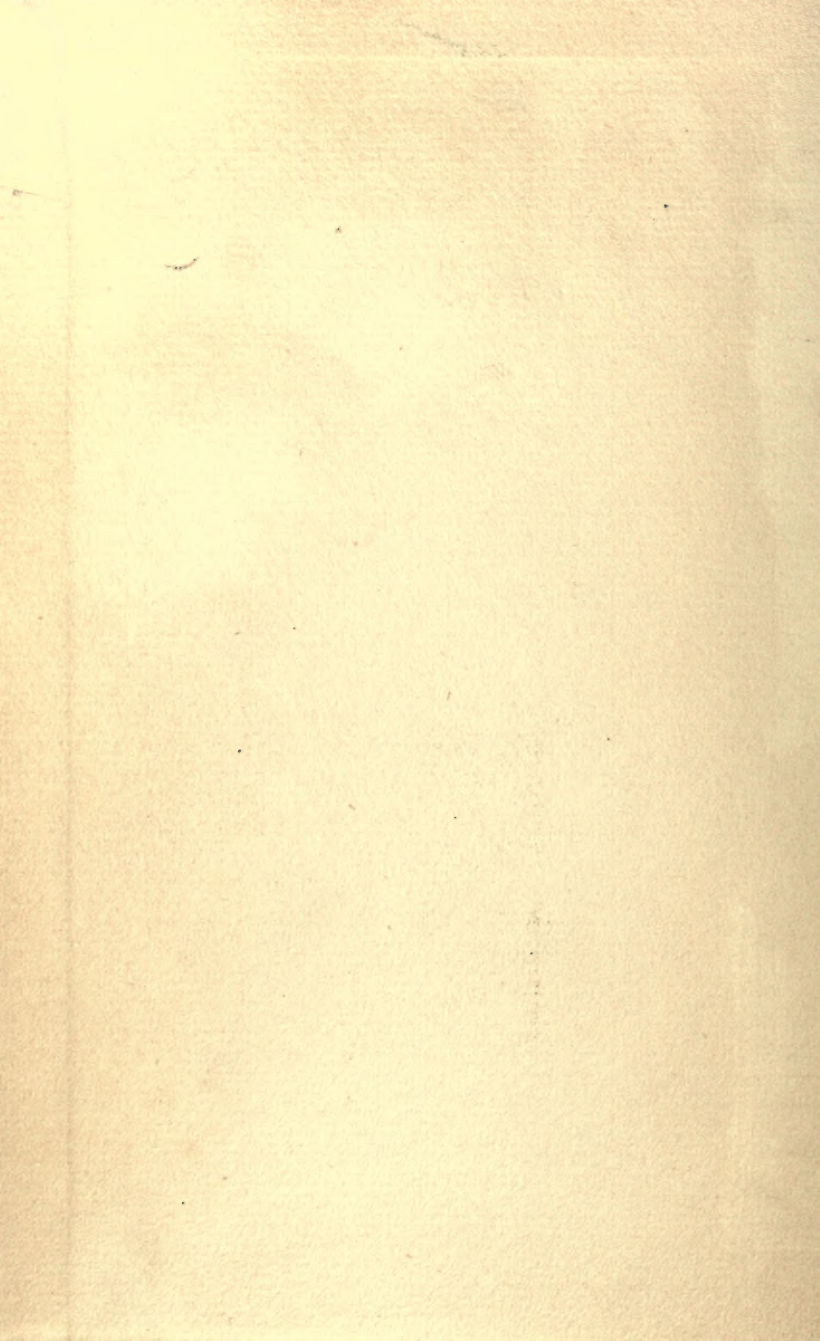


THE HOUSE OF DE MAILLY

MARGARET
HORTON
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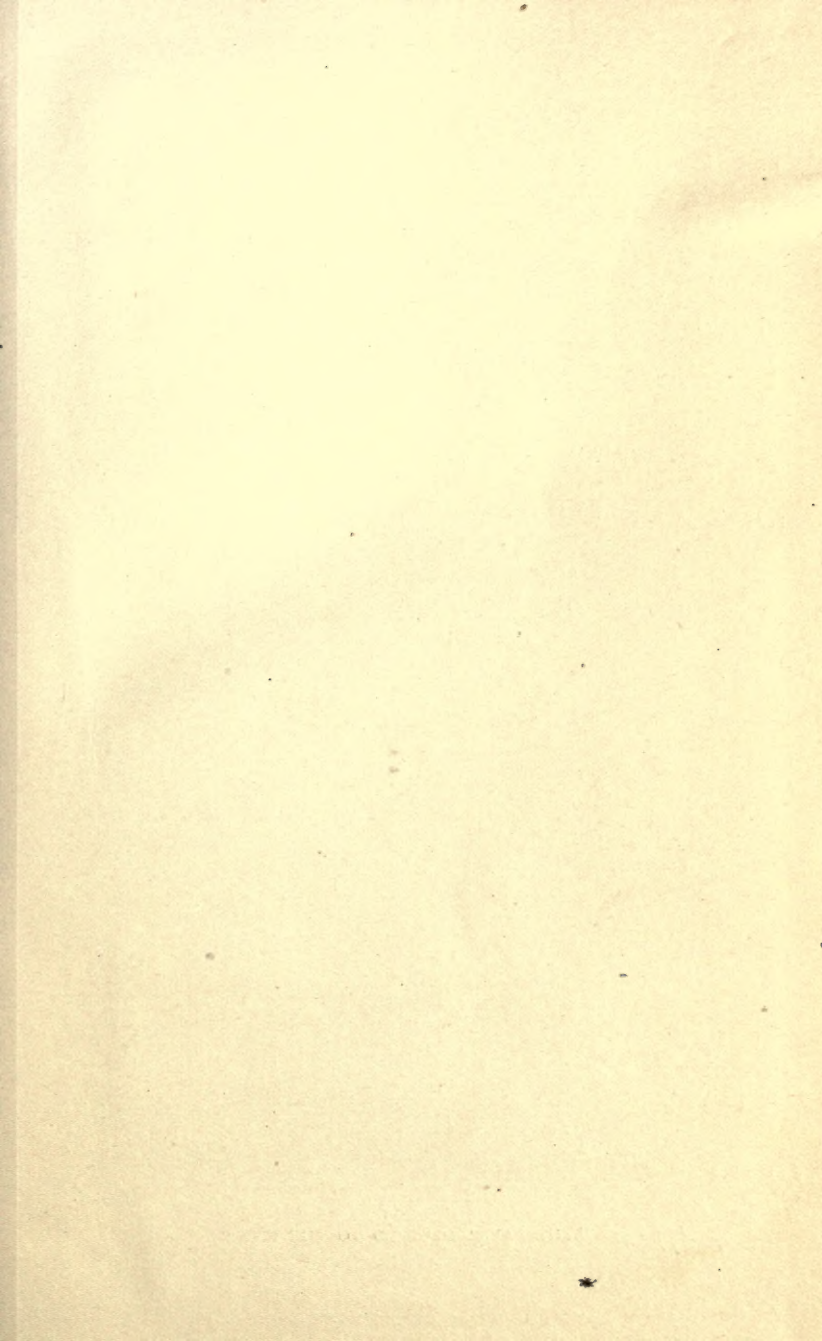
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[p. 88.]

"THE PAPER DROPPED TO THE FLOOR"

The House of de Mailly

A Romance

By

Margaret Horton Potter

Illustrated by A. I. Keller



New York and London

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1901

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TO
MY DEAREST FRIENDS
AND
KINDLIEST CRITICS
MARIE AND FREDERIC GOOKIN
THIS VOLUME IS
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Book 1

CLAUDE

The House of de Mailly

CHAPTER I

M. de Gêvres Entertains



IT was the evening of Tuesday, January 12th, in the year 1744. By six o'clock the gray of afternoon had deepened to the blackness of night, and a heavy rain began to fall, so that the Sèvres road, a mile beyond the Paris barrier, was shortly thick with mud. The only light here visible came from the window of a wretched tavern at the way-side; and by this mine host, had he been watching, would have had some difficulty in perceiving the two riders who came to an uncertain halt by his door.

"It is late, du Plessis, and we have still three miles to go. More than that, 'tis the worst cabaret in France."

"And you would be no more of a Jean-Jacques than necessary to-night—eh, Claude?" returned the other good-humoredly.

"I should prefer drowning or to perish of a rheum by the way than be poisoned by the liquor to be had here," returned the other, flicking his saddle restlessly with his riding-whip.

"So be it, then. Come, we waste time. *Mordi!* A little gently there, I beseech! It is raining mud."

A dig of the spur in the thoroughbred's flank, a spattering of drops from the puddle in which they had stood, a quick apology, and the landlord had lost his guests,

illustrious guests, who paid never a sou too much for their wine, but could make a drinking-place the fashion for weeks by five minutes' presence within it.

The two rode for some minutes in silence, though no one of the finest apperception could have felt any enmity existent between them. The night lowered. The rain pelted coldly from the starless sky; and horses and riders alike shrank from the raw, streaming atmosphere. When the silence was again broken the lights of Paris were visible in the distance. This time it seemed that du Plessis—the Duc de Richelieu—addressed his companion's secret thoughts as though he had been reading them for some time past.

"Believe me, Claude, you are unwise. She is not quite—quite of your fibre. The elder branch, you will often find, if you study these things, is less quick in sensibility, though perhaps not lacking in finesse. The King, dear child, the King—"

"The King is a man. I also am one; he, de Bourbon; I, de Mailly."

Richelieu laughed heartily. "Pretty—pretty, Claude! I must enter it in the unauthenticated register at Mme. Doublet's to-morrow! Why do you not lay the matter thus before Mme. de Châteauroux herself?"

"Ah, monsieur, I think you understand her even less than I. I do not dare address her as my position admits. My cousin cannot be more proud of our family than am I; and yet—and yet—"

In the darkness Louis Armand François du Plessis de Fronsac de Richelieu, from strong force of habit, snapped his fingers. "Afraid of a woman! Truly, we have schooled you well, Claude!"

"You, Monsieur le Duc, you yourself—have you kissed my cousin on the lips?"

"Oh, I do not infringe on his Majesty's rights."

"*Mon Dieu!* If it were any but you!—"

"Come, my dear Count, you are making an enormous mistake, permit me to say. The one thing which no man

should ever do is to take himself in great seriousness. You have yet many a lesson to learn about women. Now hear from me a bit of gravity, which shall prove my friendship for all of you—madame, yourself, and his Majesty. When it happens that a man chooses a woman, and the woman accepts that man, whether it be for love, or—something else,—it is the place of the world merely to look on. A third personality will not enter complaisantly into the tête-à-tête. The King heaps upon his Duchess the favors which only a royal lover can confer. And madame certainly does not seem loath to accept them. A dozen besides yourself are sighing after her to-day. Yet remember d'Aginois, my friend. And—and Mlle. d'Angeville is charming in 'L'Ecole des Femmes.' ”

De Richelieu smiled slightly, fumbled for his snuff-box, which was unobtainable at the moment, and never knew that Claude had angrily squared his shoulders and was cruelly hurting his horse with bit and spur. The mention of d'Angeville happily turned the subject, as the Duke had intended it to do, and by the time the barrier was reached the vicissitudes of the Count de Mailly and the position of Mme. de Châteauroux were, to all appearances, forgotten.

Once in the city, with rivers of rain above and below, and filth, crime, poverty, and utter darkness about them, Claude de Mailly and his illustrious companion made their way with what rapidity they could down the Rue de Sèvres, past St. Vincent de Paul and the Lazariste, through the little Rue Mi-Carême, the Place du Dragon, Rue Dauphine, and so out upon the quays. After riding for three squares along the river-bank, with the waters of the Seine foaming below them, the two finally passed the Pont St. Louis, and, turning down a short side street, drew up before a doorway wherein lanterns were lighted, and before which two link-boys and twice as many lackeys stood waiting. Above, upon a long iron arm, tossed by the ever-rising wind, swung a great painted sign, a harlequin in cap and bells, throwing his parti-colored cap

above his head. Below, in uncertain letters, were the words "Café Procope."

As the two gentlemen dismounted, Richelieu called to one of the servants, who hastened forward to take his bridle. A second assisted Claude, while another, evidently under orders, turned and called back to some one inside. Instantly both doors were flung wide open, while the landlord of this most popular resort himself braved the weather and came out, candelabrum in hand, to greet his guests.

"Ah, Cressin," deigned the Duke, nodding, as he entered the house, "are the rest not yet arrived?"

"Indeed, my lord, they have waited for some time above—Monsieur le Duc de Gêvres, Monsieur le Duc d'Epéron, the Marquis de Mailly-Nesle, and the Baron d'Holbach."

"Um. 'Twas the hunt kept us. Light the way up."

Claude lagged behind to throw off his wet riding-cloak, brush what water he could from his hat, and shake out his hair which had flattened beneath the protecting collar. Richelieu was kept waiting for some seconds, and the landlord had become ill at ease before the young *précieuse* signified his willingness to proceed to the room above, where his host waited.

Not a bad-looking fellow was Claude de Mailly, albeit what individuality he possessed had some difficulty in asserting itself through the immaculate foppishness of his attire. His wig, a very fine one, was arranged *à la brigadière*, and tied with the regulation black ribbon. His forehead was broad and smooth, his eyes of a grayish green, shaded with heavy black lashes and good brows, which, however, were artificially pencilled. His nose was one bequeathed of ten generations of noble ancestry; his mouth was sensitive, his complexion dark. The dress that he wore was not expensive, though its ruffles were of fine Mechlin, and he carried both patch and snuff box of ivory and gold. Richelieu, who preceded him up the narrow stairs, was a more striking figure—taller, broader of frame, with well-shaped head, great brown eyes that

had carried him through life, a hand like a woman's, with muscles of steel, a smile that had won him a king's heart, and a charm, a power of presence which had made time stand still before him, so that his eight-and-forty years were something less than Claude de Mailly's twenty-three.

Before the two noblemen and the landlord were half-way up-stairs there reached them from above the tones of familiar voices engaged in that species of conversation, half witty, half absurd, which typified the times.

"*Parbleu*, Baron, you will be calling Richelieu out to-morrow! Your carp will be ruined."

"In such case, Marquis, I must order your cousin spitted. He will have been swimming the streets long enough, by the time he arrives, to have acquired an excellent flavor, of a kind."

"Oh, 'tis more likely that the Count de Mailly's flavor would be rather cloying. All love is sweet; but his is so really violent, gentlemen, that—"

"For a month after you would sicken with the mere thought of a rissole," cried the Duke from the threshold.

"And the epitaph which you would place over my picked bones," said Claude, from behind Richelieu's shoulder, "would be:

Sa chair, même, étant douce comme miel,
Sa nature était aussi belle.
Il entra dans la vie réelle."

"Bravo! Claude. We will forgive the lost feet. You have purchased pardon," cried d'Holbach, smiling. He and de Mailly-Nesle, Claude's cousin and the brother of Mme. de Châteauroux, went forward to greet the late-comers. D'Holbach, epicurean philosopher, and host of the small company, gave them a genial welcome. The Marquis grasped his cousin's hands, and bowed familiarly to the Duke, while the other two men in the room, d'Epéron and de Gêvres, boon companions, both intimates of the King, the one an amateur physician, the

other an adept at embroidery, remained languidly seated, deigning a nod and smile to the last arrivals.

After a few further words of greeting and explanation, the party of six arranged themselves about the oval table, on which were already placed the *hors-d'oeuvres* and sweet wines, while Cressin hurried away towards his kitchens to command the attendance of two waiters and the first course of the supper. Only part of the evening's entertainment was being given by the Baron d'Holbach. M. de Gêvres had arranged an amusement for the night which promised some novelty even to these utterly *blasé* gentlemen. He proposed conducting his friends across the river to his *hôtel*, which, by royal permission, had, very conveniently for his pocket, been turned into a public gambling-house. Its redoubtable owner, when not at Versailles, lived in exquisite style in his château at St. Ouen; and, since there was always a place for him in the Tuileries, the Hôtel Richelieu, or, more covertly, the Hôtel de Sauvré, in Paris, he had not yet felt any poignant discomfort through the loss of his ancestral house. On the contrary, the unique pleasure of appearing in its familiar rooms furnished with the rows of tables, frequented by bourgeois and dwellers in St. Antoine, with the presence of an occasional petty noble, was really very refreshing to the jaded spirit of this vaporish child of highest France.

It was a particularly select little company who gathered about the table in the private salon of the Café Procope on this stormy night. All of them were of the bluest of blood; all of them spent the greater part of their time about the person of the King; to all, the doors of any and every house or salon in Paris were open at any hour; and not one of them but had had hearts flung at him from the night of his first appearance in the Gallery of Mirrors to the present moment, when interest in the *hors-d'oeuvres* was beginning to wane, and the first course of the supper should have been making its appearance. D'Epernon had commenced to bore them all with some remarks

upon the recent blood-letting of his Majesty after a rout at Choisy, when Claude jumped unceremoniously from the table, crossed the room to a mirror, and took out his patchbox.

"Trust you'll have no women to-night, de Gêvres," he remarked, breaking in upon d'Epernon. "I am wet through. My wig is in strings, and the powder has melted away like—like snow in June. While my boots"—taking out a large star and pasting it below the corner of his left eye—"my boots will not be fit for my valet, when we return to-night."

"Claude is standing there, my lords, aching with vanity to have me relate to you how crazily he has borne himself to-day. *Ciel!* 'Twould be driving me mad with anxiety to learn how soon I should be registering my presence at the Bastille, had I shown myself so little of a courtier, so utterly reckless for the sake of madame's admiration as has he."

Before any one had time to voice his curiosity, Claude turned quickly from the mirror. "The Bastille, Richelieu! The Bastille! Surely—"

"Why not, my child? I have been there thrice for less; and the last time, had it not been for my ever-honored Duchess of Modena—umph! I had been carried out shorter by a head than when I went in!"

The five gentlemen smiled broadly at certain memories still occasionally recalled on a rainy day at Versailles. But Henri, Claude's cousin, looked anxious. "What is your last exploit, Claude? Marie has been inciting you to rashness again?"

Claude laughed. "Madame did not honor me by a single command. I rode a course, I shot a stag, and I won—this, which was intended for a king, not me."

Forthwith the young fellow drew from beneath his waistcoat something which even de Gêvres leaned forward to see. It was a glove, a white gauntlet, weighted on the back with a crest heavily embroidered in gold, and set here and there with tiny sapphires of the color lately

known as *oeil du Roi*; while upon the smooth leather palm was painted a very good miniature of his gracious Majesty, Louis XV.

The little group of courtiers glanced from the trophy to the face of its owner, who was gazing upon them with a smile not wholly unconscious, but wisely tempered with cynicism. Presently the Baron reached forward and took the costly article from Claude. Holding it with a delicate touch in the light of a waxen candle, he smiled as he observed:

"Madame should not have removed this ere she gave it to you, my dear Count."

"I would to God she had not!" cried de Mailly-Nesle.

Four pairs of brows went gently up, but Claude's eyes met those of his cousin with such an expression of affection and melancholy that for an instant he seemed to be transformed to some other order of man.

The slight pause was broken by the entrance of the first course proper of the supper. The Count took back his gage and thrust it again to the conventional resting-place over his heart; and while the innumerable dishes were being placed upon the table or passed about, he returned the patch-box to his pocket and seated himself between his cousin and Richelieu.

"Now that Claude has given you his meagre idea of the crisis through which he passed to-day," remarked Claude's companion, helping himself to a fillet of partridge, "permit me to advance to him my own opinion of the affair, as well as to lay the tale before you all. His coming fate shall be surmised by you. Now hark: His Majesty and a little suite rode to Rambouillet yesterday, in the afternoon. The hunters were to follow this morning; but they say that de Rosset never permits the King to rise earlier than eight o'clock, so that he is fain to be near the forest on the day of the chase. I was with him; but, for some royal reason, Madame la Duchesse, despite some very eloquent pleading on my part, had refused to go. Possibly Mme. de Toulouse is of family too scru-

pulous to receive her.”* The Dukes and d’Holbach smiled. “Claude, however, was of the royal train, for, mark you, gentlemen, Louis adores the Count at twenty miles distance from madame his cousin. Well, then, at ten this morning the meet was called at the edge of the forest. His Majesty was in a frenzy of eagerness, and looked—did he not look like a little god, my dear Count? Hein? But for the point. The first deer had not yet been started by the keepers when a diversion occurred. His Majesty was talking with the head man. There was a murmur behind us. I turned about, and saw—”

“Monsieur le Comte perishing of loneliness,” murmured de Gêvres, feebly.

“Not at all. On the contrary. It was Monsieur le Comte dismounted, standing beside the newly arrived coach of Mme. de Châteauroux, with his head so very far inside the window that it set some of us thinking—many things. *Parbleu!* I would that you had seen Louis’ face.”

“Madame must have risen very early,” remarked d’Epernon, helping himself to a cream.

“Madame is always wonderful. When she stepped from the conveyance to greet her liege she looked more of a queen than her Majesty ever did. Small wonder that the King was all devotion. Before he had finished his first compliment, the heartless Leroy came forward to announce that stags do not wait. Madame was very gracious, and instantly mounted the horse prepared for her. She had driven from Versailles in her crimson habit. When all was ready, the King turned in his saddle and cried out before us: ‘What reward have you to offer, madame, to him who shall present you with the antlers to-day?’ We all watched her. She smiled charmingly for an instant. Some turned their eyes then upon the King. I was more subtle. I gazed at Claude.”

“He is certainly very pleasant to look upon,” observed d’Holbach, absently.

* The Count of Toulouse was a legitimated son of Louis XIV.

"'Twas not his beauty, Baron. I am most tender of his modesty. But, next time I plead with Mlle. Mercier for life and hope, I shall imitate the look he wore at that moment."

"Take care, my dear Richelieu. She will marry you if you do."

"On my faith, that would not be bad. 'Tis an excellent way to rid one's self of a woman. Baron, the carp is marvellous. Madame, of course, offered the glove that you have seen as gage of triumph. It is worth eighty livres. Lesage himself did the miniatures. When we finally set off, Louis' eyes were bright with certainty of success; for who would dare to engage in rivalry with the King?"

"Come, come, du Plessis, finish the tale. You are straining the budding nonchalance of de Mailly here to an alarming degree."

Richelieu shrugged. "We started, madame following at a little distance, though half a dozen ladies rode. After a quarter of an hour we got sight of the animal, and de Sauvré fired at it, but missed. By the manner in which his Majesty sat his horse, as we raced along to gain on the beast, we all knew that our shots must go astray to-day. Gradually the King drew away from the rest of us, and we reined the horses a little. That is, all but one of us played good courtier. The one was Claude."

"Monsieur, you might dare Satan for a lady if you would; but no one should dare the King."

"Dare the King he did. In five minutes all of us were far enough behind to watch, while they two—de Mailly and de Bourbon, gentlemen—were neck and neck among the hounds. Presently the Count fired, and—missed. I hoped that it was purpose, for he did not reload. Then the stag ran through a little clearing, so that for fifty yards it was a perfect mark. Louis fired, of course, but the game kept on. I saw the King throw back his head with his gesture of anger. Then de Mailly—oh! how couldst thou, Claude?—drew a pistol from his holster and fired. That bullet was made for death. I never saw a

prettier shot. It went straight into the deer's neck. Another five yards. The animal wavered. The King was reloading his weapon. Claude was like lightning with his hands. Before his Majesty's gun was ready the pistol sounded again, and the beast fell."

"Good Heaven, Claude! You have done badly!" cried Henri, leaning over the table.

His words were echoed by the rest.

"But his Majesty permitted you the trophy?" drawled d'Epéron, unguardedly.

"Permitted, my lord!" exclaimed the young man, haughtily; "the gauntlet was not his Majesty's to give."

Richelieu laughed. "'Twas a comedy, gentlemen; but a dangerous one. Louis was suavely furious; madame annoyed and alarmed, but as indifferent as any coquette should be. Claude was charmingly humble and amorous. It was I who obtained permission for him and for myself to retire after luncheon. Certainly, Louis seemed entirely willing to grant it. So together we returned to Versailles, dressed, and came on here. And—oh! I had forgot to mention it, but 'twas a marked fact that when madame presented her left gauntlet to her cousin, the January skies instantly began to weep. Now, a question: Was it from sympathy with the King, or dread for the Count de Mailly?"

"Fear for the Count, du Plessis. The King needs small sympathy."

"Possibly thou'rt right, Baron. Who so happy as the King? What does he lack? He is a King; he has France for his purse; he is as handsome as the Queen is ugly; and the most stately woman in Europe inhabits the little apartments. What more could he wish for?"

Claude bit his lip and his eyes sparkled with anger.

"M. de Mailly, you do not eat."

"I have finished, Baron."

"Soho! I did well not to have a second course, then. Now, gentlemen, the toasts. M. de Mailly-Nesle, I propose your marquise."

"Not his wife, d'Holbach!"

"You mistake, Monsieur le Duc. I speak of Mme. de Coigny."

"Ah! With pleasure! She is a most piquant madcap."

Henri flushed. The lady whom he deeply and sincerely loved was a far tenderer subject with him than his reckless and heartless companions dreamed of or could have understood. But he drank the toast without comment, and was relieved to find that the conversation was straying from her as well as from his cousin's affair. Claude, perhaps, was not so well pleased. He was too young a lover, and too much in love, to rejoice that other women were being brought up for discussion; and he was too heedless of the delicacy of his position to care to contemplate its different aspects while the others talked. For, as to the matter of royal disfavor, it disturbed him not in the least; rather he looked upon the prospect of it as something which should redound to his credit in the eyes of her who at present constituted the single motive of his life. For the next twenty minutes, then, he sat over his wine, drinking all the toasts, and joining in the conversation when Mme. de Lauraguais, another sister of Henri's, was mentioned. But the interest had gone out of his eyes. Richelieu marked him silently; d'Holbach smiled with kindly humor on perceiving his preoccupation; and his cousin the Marquis read his mood with regret. Henri de Mailly-Nesle had long since given up any hope of control over his sister, the favorite; and, through a life-long companionship, Claude had been to him closer than a brother. Thus, whatever interest he felt in the latest developments of the Count's rash rivalry with the King, was all on behalf of the weaker side, that of his friend.

The six gentlemen had not been more than twenty minutes over their wine when de Gêvres finally rose from his chair, and, as host for the remainder of the night, made suggestion of departure.

"How shall we cross to my *hôtel*? It rains too heavily for riding. Shall we go by chair?"

"By chair, monsieur! *Pardieu!* I had thought we were citizens to-night. Let us walk."

"My dear Baron," expostulated d'Epernon, "my surtout would not stand it, I swear to you!"

"A murrain on your surtout!" retorted Richelieu. "Baron, I accompany you on foot."

"And I also," added Claude. "I wish to ruin my boots completely. I have given Rochard too many things of late."

"A bad idea, Count. Pay your servants, and they leave you at once; it is such a bourgeois thing to do."

"We walk, then?" inquired d'Epernon. "I am sure we must be going to do so when M. de Gêvres addresses M. de Mailly upon the care of servants. Monsieur le Marquis—your servant."

Richelieu and the Baron were already at the door. D'Epernon and Henri followed. There was nothing for it but for the third Duke to accept the companionship of the Count, and prepare to ruin his surtout also. As the small party passed out of the door of the café, Richelieu called over his shoulder:

"Your horse is here, Claude. I had mine sent to my *hôtel*. Surely you will not attempt to ride back to Versailles to-night. Will you lodge with me?"

"Thank you; but Henri will house me, I think—will you not, cousin?"

"Certainly, Claude. Madame will scarcely have any one in my wing to-night, I think; though I confess that I have not been there for a week."

"A bad idea," muttered Richelieu to the Baron. "I kept my ladies in better training—when I had them."

It was fifteen minutes' rapid walk from the Procope to the Hôtel de Gêvres. From the Quai des Tournelles the six proceeded to the Pont St. Michel, over the river, across the island, and to the new city by the Pont au Change, at the east end of which, near the Place du Chat, stood the most recent and most noted gambling-house in Paris. Three or four lanterns, shining dimly through the drip-

ping night, lighted the doorways, which were open to the weather. Richelieu, d'Holbach, d'Epernon, and Henri entered together, with Claude and de Gêvres close behind. It was Richelieu who accosted the manager of the house in the *entresol*; for the owner of the place was not desirous of recognition. M. Basquinet, discerning that the newcomers were of rank, in spite of the fact that they came on foot, at once offered a private room.

"The devil, good cit, d'ye take us for a pack of farmers-general? By my marrow, I've scarcely livres enough to grease the dice-cup, let alone paying your nobility prices for new wine and bad rum. Private room—ha! excellent, you tax-collector, excellent, excellent!"

So spake Richelieu, in his favorite *badaud*, with a tone that no dweller in the Court of Miracles could have bettered for its purpose. The little party smiled covertly at sight of the landlord's crestfallen air, and then the other five followed their new plebeian leader up the broad ancestral staircase, leaving behind the steady murmur of voices and the chink of coin which had reached their ears from the chance-machine rooms on either side of the hallway. On the second floor were the public rooms for played games; on the third, private apartments for such as chose to make a retreat of the place. And, in truth, many a well-known quarrel had fomented, and many a desperate duel already been fought, in those chambers, which of old had sheltered the royal and noble guests of the family de Gêvres.

The dice-room, the destination of Monsieur le Duc's present distinguished company, was very large, having once been the grand salon of the house. It was well filled by this hour, thick with smoke, heavy-aired with the fumes of mulled wine, and alive with the clack of the implements of the game and the subdued murmur of exclamations and utterances. The six gentlemen made their way to a table in the far corner of the room from which the door was invisible; and, seating themselves, they called at once for the cups, English pipes, and English rum:

"By all means, rum," nodded the Baron d'Holbach.

"What other beverage would harmonize with this scene? We are surrounded by those a step lower than the bourgeoisie. For the time we also are lower than the bourgeoisie."

"And by to-morrow we shall have still stronger means of appreciation," retorted d'Epéron, "for our heads will feel as those of the bourgeoisie never did."

The rum was brought, however, together with dice, and those long-stemmed clay pipes of which one broke three or four of an evening, and but rarely drew more than one mouthful of smoke from a light. Still imitating the manners of those about them, each two gentlemen played with a single cup, thus doing away with any possibility of loaded dice. Unlike the common people, however, they used no money on the table; perhaps for the simplest of reasons—that they had no money to use. "Poor as a nobleman, rich as a bourgeois," was a common enough expression at that day, and as true as such sayings generally are. How debts of honor were paid at Versailles none but those concerned ever knew. But paid they always were, and that within the time agreed upon; and there was no newly invented extravagance, no fresh and useless method of expenditure for baubles or jewelled garments, that every courtier did not feel it a duty as well as pleasure to indulge at once. For the last twenty-five years there had been, as for the next five there would be, a continually increasing costliness in the mode of Court life, and a consequent diminution in Court incomes, until the end—the end of all things for France's highest and best—should come with merciful, swift fury.

Each member of the party, this evening, played with him in whose company he had walked from the café: de Gêvres and the Count; Richelieu and d'Holbach; d'Epéron and Mailly-Nesle. The three games were in marked contrast to those carried on about them. Not a word relative to losses or winnings was spoken. The stakes were agreed upon almost in whispers; the cubes were rattled and thrown—once; then again from the other side. The differences

were noted mentally. Winner and loser sipped their rum, drew at a pipe, and made a new stake. Sometimes ten minutes would be spent in watching the noisy eagerness of men at a neighboring table, for that was the chief object in their coming to-night.

The great hall was filled with those of an essentially low order. Coarse faces, coarse manners, coarse garments, and coarse oaths abounded there, though now and again might be found a velvet coat, a lace ruffle, and a manner badly aped from the supposed elegancies of the Court. A strange and motley throng gathered from all Paris wherever this common vice held men in its grip. Here those from the criminal quarters, from the Faubourg St. Antoine, from the streets of petty shopkeepers and tradesmen, from the little bourgeoisie, came to mingle together, indiscriminately, equalized, rendered careless of the origin of companions by their common love of the dice. Here were men of all ages, from the fierce stripling who regarded a franc as a fortune, to the senile creature, glued to his chair, the cubes rattling continually in his trembling cup, and the varying luck of the evening his life and death. All the pettiness and some of the nobility to be found in mankind were portrayed here, could those who had come to study have read aright. D'Holbach, the philosopher, doubtless did so, for men had been his mental food for many years. Nevertheless he said nothing to Richelieu of what he discovered; but took snuff when he lost, and puffed at his pipe when he won, and cogitated alone among those whom he knew so well.

Time drew on apace and the evening was passing. There were few arrivals now; the rooms were filled, and it was too early for departure. M. de Gêvres wished, possibly, that the hours would hurry a little, for he was losing heavily to Claude. Nevertheless he gave no sign of discomfort, and even interrupted the Count's purposeful pauses to continue the game. Just as de Mailly shook for a stake of five hundred livres, two people, gentlemen by dress, entered the room. Claude threw high. The

Duke, with an inward exclamation of anger, gently received the cup. He shook with perfect nonchalance, and finally dropped the ivory squares delicately before him.

"Bravo, M. de Gêvres; you have thrown well!"

The Duke started to his feet. His example was speedily followed by the rest of the party, who, after bowing with great respect, stood looking in amazement at the newcomer. His companion, who was bareheaded, remained a little behind, grinning good-naturedly at the gamesters. Richelieu spoke first:

"Indeed, your Maj—"

"Pardon, du Plessis, the Chevalier Mêlot."

"Your pardon, Sire. You take us by surprise."

"Has any one suffered from the shock?"

"I, Sire, I think, since your coming has turned my luck," remarked Claude, with the double meaning in his words perfectly apparent to every one there.

"Um—yes, I had thought M. de Gêvres must win with eleven. Come, gentlemen, add two to your party, and forget, for the evening, even as he will do, the unimpeachable propriety of M. de Berryer."*

De Berryer laughed, and drew two more chairs to the table.

"Do not stand," continued the King. "I am merely Chevalier to-night."

Louis seated himself beside Richelieu, with whom he evinced a desire to speak privately. D'Holbach, perceiving this, began at once, with his usual tact, to entertain the rest of the company by an anecdote concerning d'Alembert and Voltaire. Immediately the King turned to his favorite courtier.

"De Mailly came straight to Paris with you to-day?"

"We rode to Versailles first, Sire; changed our clothes there, and came hither immediately."

"And now the truth, Richelieu. I will brook nothing less. He did not see madame after he left the hunt?"

* The Chief of Police, and a favorite companion of the King.

The Duke opened his eyes. "We left Mme. de Château-roux with you. We have not seen her since."

The King drew a deep breath. "She left the hunting-party half an hour after you, knowing that it was not in my power to follow her. I feared it was to join—him. I have left everything to make sure of his whereabouts. The fellow drives me mad."

While Louis spoke a gleam came into the Duke's eyes. He smiled slightly, and said, with a nod towards de Berryer, and that daring which was permitted to him alone, "Your Majesty brought a *lettre-de-cachet* in some one else's pocket?"

Louis looked slightly nonplussed. He shrugged, however, as he answered, "No *lettre-de-cachet* will be used." Then, as the laughter from the Baron's tale subsided, the King addressed the party: "We will not stop your game, my friends. In fact—in fact, I will myself play one of you."

"And which of us is to be so honored, Chevalier?" inquired d'Epernon.

"It is a difficult choice, I confess. However, choice must be. Monsieur le Comte, will you try three turns with me?"

There was a little round of glances as Claude bowed, murmuring appreciation of the honor.

"The dice, then!" cried the King. "Richelieu, your cup. We will play with but one."

"And he who throws twice best shall win?" repeated the Duke.

"Yes."

"What are the stakes?" inquired the Baron, gently.

Claude's heart sank, while his cousin dared not allow his sympathy to appear. It was frequently ruinous work, this gaming with a King; and the revenues of the younger branch of the house of de Mailly were not great.

"The stakes," returned Louis, with a long glance at his opponent, "shall be, on my side—" he threw back his cloak, unbuttoned a plain surtout, and from his ruffles

unfastened a diamond star of great value—"this." He placed it upon the table.

There was a little, regular murmur of conventional admiration. Claude bit his lip thoughtfully. "And mine?" he asked, looking squarely at the King.

Louis coughed, and waved one hand, with a gesture of deprecation at the question. "Yours should not be so large. We play to the goddess of chance. You—um—ha—you won, to-day, a certain gauntlet of white leather; a simple thing, but it will do. I will play this for that. You see the odds are favorable to you."

Claude flushed scarlet, and not a man at the table moved. "The gauntlet was a gage, Sire."

"We play for it," was the reply.

The Count glanced round the circle, noting each face in turn. Baron d'Holbach was engaged with snuff. The other faces, excepting only de Berryer's, were blank. But Richelieu's eyes met those of Claude, and the head of the King's favorite gentleman shook, ever so slightly, at the rebellion in the Count's face. Then, very slowly, de Mailly unfastened his coat and drew from its place the glove of Mme. de Châteauroux. He laid it on the table beside the star.

"We play!" cried his Majesty, smiling as he seized the leathern cup. He shook well, and dropped the dice vigorously before him.

"Seven!" cried the company. It was four and three.

Claude received the implements from the King's hands, tossed and threw.

"Eight!" was the return. It was three and five.

The King bit his lip, and hastily played again. The cubes stared up at him impudently. On one was a three, on the other a one. None spoke, for Louis frowned.

Claude was very sober but very composed as he tried his second chance. It seemed that he could not but win. The courtiers hung quietly on the play. When the cup was lifted from the dice there was a series of exclamations. Claude himself laughed a little, and the King

drew a long sigh of relief. Two and one had de Mailly thrown.

It was Henri who voiced the general interest. "You are even," he said, quietly.

The King suddenly rose to his feet. "Not for long!" he exclaimed. For some seconds he rattled the dice in the box, not attempting to conceal his palpable nervousness. When the black spots which lay uppermost were finally counted, a smile broke over the royal lips. Ten points he had made this time.

De Mailly, who had also risen, looked at them for a second with compressed lips, but did not hesitate in his throw. Like de Gêvres, he dropped the squares before him with pointed delicacy. Then he stepped quietly back, with a throb at his heart, but no change in his face. Not a courtier spoke.

"We will play again!" cried the King, loudly, for they were, indeed, no longer even. M. de Mailly had thrown six and six.

"Pardon, your Majesty," said Claude, in reply to the King's voiced desire. "I could not play again against France and hope to win, though by but a single point. Therefore I beg that you will spare my humiliation, and accept the gauntlet as proof of your gracious forgiveness of my daring."

At this Richelieu looked open-faced approval upon the Count; and de Gêvres and d'Epèrnon, who had been roused from their ordinary state of ennui by the pretty comedy played before them, glanced at each other with appreciation of so excellent an act of courtiership.

"Monsieur le Comte, if I accept your generosity, it must only be on condition that, as gage of my esteem for you, and our mutual good-will, you wear this star. Permit me to fasten it upon your coat."

The small ceremony over, and the light of royal favor glittering in the candle-rays over the Count de Mailly's heart, his Majesty, with tender touch, took up the coveted gauntlet, put it inside his embroidered waistcoat, and,



"DE MAILLY HAD THROWN SIX AND SIX"

placing his hand on de Berryer's shoulder, bowed a good-night to the party and the Hôtel de Gêvres.

Immediately after the King left, the other participant in the struggle for a woman's gage also rose. Claude was tired. He had no mind to be assailed with the volley of epigrams, *bons-mots*, and various comments that he knew would soon begin to be discharged from the brains of his companions. Certainly, he should have considered the episode a happy one. Already, since that talk of esteem and good-will from the King, he could feel the change in attitude assumed towards him by de Gêvres and d'Epernon. But the sight of these figures wearied him now; and he suddenly longed for a solitude in which to face his rapidly growing regret that his cousin's glove had passed out of his possession.

"What, monsieur!" cried de Gêvres, when he rose, "you will not give me the chance to retrieve myself to-night?"

"Small hope for you with such luck as the Count's," returned d'Holbach. "When a man wins two points off a king, by how much may he defeat a duke? Reply, Richelieu. It is geometry."

Richelieu laughed. "I congratulate you, Monsieur le Comte," he said.

De Mailly bowed. Then, turning to the Marquis, he held out his hand. "Will you come, Henri, or must I beg shelter of Madame la Marquise alone?"

"I come, Claude. Good-night, and thanks for a most charming evening, and a comedy worthy of Grandval, messieurs."

"Thank thy sister for that," returned de Gêvres.

Claude made a general salute, and then, without further parley, accompanied his friend from the room and the house.

"My horse is still at the Procope," observed Claude at the door.

"No, I ordered it sent to my *hôtel* before we left the café."

"We walk, then?"

"I am afraid so. I did not think to order my coach, and not a chair will be obtainable on such a night."

"It is as well. The exercise will be a relief."

They started at a good pace up the long, wide thoroughfare that bordered the river, and walked for some minutes in a silence that was replete with sympathy. It was some distance from the gambling-house to the Hôtel de Mailly, Henri's abode, which was situated on the west bank of the Seine, on the Quai des Théatins, just opposite the Tuileries, on the Pont Royal. The wind was coming sharply from the east, bringing with it great, pelting rain-drops that stung the face like bullets. Henri was glad to shield his head from the cutting attack by holding his heavy cloak up before it. Ordinarily the walk at this hour would have been one of no small danger; but to-night even the dwellers in the criminal quarter were undesirous of plying their midnight trade by the river-bank. The cousins had passed the dark cluster of buildings about the old Louvre before either spoke. At length, however, the Marquis broke silence.

"Claude, you have passed a point in life to-day, I think."

"With the two that I won from the King, Henri?"

"Those and the gauntlet of Marie Anne."

There was a little pause. Then Claude said, in a tone whose weary monotony indicated a subject so often thought of as to be trite even in expression:

"Do you—ever regret—that Anne went the way—of the other two? Will she—do you think, finish as did poor little Pauline? Or—will some other send her from her place—as—she did—my brother's wife, Louise?"

As Claude had hesitated over the questions, so was Henri long in making reply. "I do not allow myself, Claude, to wonder over might-have-beens. There is a fate upon our family, I think. But of the three of our women who have gone her way, Marie is the fittest of them all for her place. Little Pauline—Félicité, we named her—her death—my God, I do not like to think of it! And poor, weak

Louise—your brother loved her dearly, Claude. And he is dead, and she—is making her long penance in that great tomb of the Ursulines. Heigh-ho! Thank the good God, my cousin, that you have neither sister nor wife in this Court of France. There is not one of them can withstand the great temptation. Our times were not made for the women we love.”

And for the rest of their walk both men thought upon these same last words, which, through Claude’s head, at least, had begun to ring like a dark refrain of prophecy, of warning: “Our times were not made for the women we love.”

It was half an hour past midnight when the Marquis pounded the knocker on the door of his *hôtel* by the Seine. It was opened with unusual readiness by the liveried porter, who betrayed some surprise at sight of those who waited to enter.

“Oh, my lord is not at Versailles!”

“As you see, we are here,” returned Henri, adding, “My apartment is ready?”

“Certainly, Monsieur le Marquis’ apartment is ready.”

“And one for Monsieur le Comte?”

The servant bowed.

“Light us up, then. Claude, will you have supper?”

“No. Nothing more to-night.”

“Very well. Gaillard, is madame visible?”

The porter coughed. “Madame la Marquise was at Mme. de Tencin’s till late. Madame, I think, is not visible.”

Mailly-Nesle shrugged his shoulders, and proceeded to the staircase. As the servant followed with a candelabrum he made a curious, soft noise in his throat. Forthwith a footman glided swiftly into the hall from an antechamber, and took the other’s place beside the door as if waiting for some one. Both nobles saw it. Neither spoke.

Five minutes later Claude was alone in his room. Henri had left him for the night, and he refused the services of a lackey in lieu of his own valet, who was at Versailles.

The servant had lighted his candles, and a wood-fire burned in the grate. His wet coat had been carried away to dry. His hat, surtout, and gloves lay upon a neighboring chair. Amid the lace of his jabot glittered the jewelled star which, two hours ago, had flashed upon the breast of the King of France. Claude seated himself, absently, in a chair beside the cheerily crackling fire, facing a great picture that hung upon the brocaded wall. It was Boucher's portrait of Marie Anne de Mailly-Nesle, Marquise de la Tournelle, Duchesse de Châteauroux. She looked down upon him now in that calmly superb manner which she had used only this morning; the manner that the Court had raved over, that women vainly strove to imitate, that had conquered the indifference of a king. And as Claude de Mailly gazed, his own air, shamed perhaps by that of the woman, fell from him, as a sheet might fall from a statue. In one instant he was a different thing. He had become an individual; a man with a strong mentality of his own. The courtier's mask of imperturbable cynicism, the conventional domino of forced interest, the detestable undergarments of necessary toadyism, all were gone. Not the patch on his face, not the height of his heels, not the whiteness of his hands nor the breadth of his cuffs could make him now. Perhaps she whose painted likeness was before him would no more have cared to know him as he really was than she would have liked the words that he uttered, dreamily, before her picture. But it was the true Claude, Claude the man, nevertheless, who repeated aloud the thought in his heart:

"Our times are not made for the women we love."

CHAPTER II

The Toilet



DAWN, the late dawn of a gray, wintry morning, hung over Versailles. Within the palace walls those vast corridors, which had lately rung to sounds of life and laughter, stretched endlessly out in the ghostly chill of the vague light. Chill and stillness had crept also under many doors; and they breathed over that stately room in which Marie Anne de Châteauroux was accustomed to take the few hours of relief from feverish life granted her by kindly sleep.

Though the favorite's apartment was as dark as drawn curtains could make it, nevertheless a thin gleam of gray shot relentlessly between hanging and wall, and, falling athwart the canopied bed, announced that madame's temporary rest approached its end. Against this decree, however, madame's attitude would seem to rebel. She lay, apparently in profound sleep, in the very centre of the great bed, sheets and cover drawn closely about her, up to her throat. Only one hand, half hidden in lace, and her head, with its framing mass of yellow, powder-dulled hair, were visible. In her waking life that head of the Duchess of Châteauroux was celebrated for its marvellous poise. And even now, as it lay relaxed upon the pillow, the effect of its daytime majesty was not quite lost. Viewed thus, devoid of animation or expression, the pure, classic beauty of the face showed to better advantage, perhaps, than at another time. Already, however, ennui, and the constant effort at appearance of pleasure, had left their marks upon the regular features; and,

indeed, much other than mere beauty might be found in the countenance. If there were power in the breadth of the forehead, there was too much determination in the chin; while at each corner of the delicate mouth a faint line gave a cast of resolution, dogged and relentless, to the feminine *ensemble*.

Presently, as the shadows melted more and more, the woman's silken-lashed eyes fell open, and the first of her waking thoughts was expressed in a long, melancholy sigh.

The duties of the Duchess as Lady of the Palace of the Queen necessitated her presence at the grand toilet of her Majesty on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. On Tuesday, Thursday, and Sunday, therefore, except on those weeks when she was in constant attendance on Louis' consort, the Châteauroux accustomed the Court to a toilet of her own, which the King's faction religiously frequented, while the Queen's circle, the religious party, rolled their eyes, clasped their hands, violently denounced the insolence of it, and fervently wished that they might go, too. Certainly madame's morning receptions were eminently successful, and, however much gentle Marie Leczinska might disapprove of them in secret, she never had the courage to anger her husband by voicing her sense of indignity. Thus, six mornings of the week being provided for, on Saturday the Duchess confessed herself, though no absolution was to be had, and prayed forgiveness for the other part of her life.

As madame awoke, and the clock upon her mantel-piece struck eight, a door into the room swung open, and a trimly dressed maid came in. She pushed back the curtains from the window, looped them up, and crossed to the bedside.

"'Tis you, Antoinette?" came a voice from beneath the canopy.

"Yes, madame. Shall I bring the water?"

"At once."

As Antoinette once more disappeared, madame sat up and pushed aside the curtains of her bed.

For the following quarter of an hour, while the first part of the toilet was being performed, the second and elaborate half of that daily function was prepared for in the second room of the favorite's suite—the famous boudoir. A remarkable little room this, with its silken hangings of Persian blue and green and white; and a remarkable little man it was who sat informally upon a tabouret, in the midst of the graceful confusion of chairs, sofas, consoles, and inlaid stands, while in front of him was the second dressing-table, whereon reposed the paraphernalia of the coiffeur, and beside him was a small bronze brazier, where charcoal, for the heating of irons, burned. The profession of M. Marchon was instantly proclaimed by his elaborate elegance of wig. He had been, at some time, perruquier to each French queen of the last three decades, from Mme. de Prie to the ill-fated sisters of the present Duchess. Just now he was ogling, in the last Court manner, the second wardrobe-girl, who stood near him, beside a spindle-legged table, polishing a mirror. And Célestine ogled the weazened Marchon while she worked and wondered if madame would miss her last present from d'Argenson, a Chinese mandarin with a rueful smile, who sat alone in the cabinet of toys, and ceaselessly waved his head. The courtly companionship between the two servants had lasted for some time when there came a faint scratch on the bedroom door. It was Antoinette's friendly signal. The hair-dresser leaped to his place and bent over the irons, while Célestine forced her eyes from the bit of porcelain and put away her polishing cloth as Mme. de Châteauroux entered the room.

The Duchess seated herself before the first table, where Mlle. Célestine administered certain effective and skilfully applied touches to the pale face, and when these had rendered her to her mind for the hour, madame surrendered herself into Marchon's hands, where she would remain for a good part of the morning.

The preliminary brushing of the yellow locks had not yet been completed when the first *valet-de-chambre* threw

open the door from the antechamber and announced carefully:

"The Duc de Gêvres."

De Gêvres, as usual, delayed his entrance a full minute. Then he came in languidly, snuff-box in his right hand, hat under his arm, peruke immaculate, and eye-glass dangling at his waist. He bowed. Madame raised her hand. The Duke advanced, lifted it to his lips, and left upon its fair surface a faint red trace of his salute. Madame smiled.

"You have come to me early," she said.

"I arose," remarked the man, pensively, "to find the world in gray. I arrayed myself to match the sky, and came to seek the sun. When I leave you I shall don pale blue, for you will drive the clouds from my day."

Madame smiled again. "Thank you. But the gray is marvellously becoming. Pray do not attempt a second toilet this morning. One is singularly depressing."

"Surely, you are not depressed, Madame de Versailles?" he asked, idly, examining her *negligée* of India muslin with approval. "Why depressed? Louis was furious at your unaccountable absence from the salon last evening, and would play with no one. He stayed in a corner for two hours, railing at d'Orry and permitting not a soul to approach. Is it in pity for him, this morning, that you suffer?"

Madame shrugged. "I do not waste time in pity of his Majesty. At the request of Mme. d'Alincourt, I spent last evening in the apartments of the Queen."

"Good Heaven! Then, madame, allow me to express my deepest sympathy! I had no idea that you would play so recklessly with ennui. Why, your very gossip is a day old!"

"You, then, monsieur, I hail as my deliverer. Will you not act as my *Nouvelles à la Main*, that I may make no irretrievable blunder to-day?"

"Madame desires, the King is at her feet. Madame requests, and the gods obey. Where must one begin?"

"At the beginning."

De Gêvres smiled slowly in retrospection. It was for this precise opportunity that he had risen an hour early and dared royal displeasure by being alone with the favorite for thirty minutes. He rose from the chair he had taken, drew a tabouret to within a yard of the Duchess's knee, and resealed himself significantly.

"You frighten me, my lord. It must be serious."

De Gêvres shrugged. "Oh, not necessarily. You shall judge." He glanced meditatively at her feet, tapped his snuff-box, and began to speak just as Marchon finished the first curl. "Without doubt, madame, even after the deplorable past evening, you still recollect the rather *outré* events of the day before. You cannot yet have forgotten the last Rambouillet chase, the gage you offered, his Majesty's unfortunate chagrin, and the intrepid, if rash, ardor of your young cousin, Count Claude?"

"Thus far my memory carries me, monsieur. Continue."

"Well! The rest is, indeed, curious. In spite of the Count's heroic gallantry, he appeared, later in the day, to have repented somewhat of having so eagerly dared the royal displeasure. A company of my friends were so good as to visit, with me, my *hôtel*—you know its condition—for play, on this very evening. By great good fortune, his Majesty, together with a companion, did us the honor himself to join our party a little later. When the King beheld his successful rival, the Count, seated with us, he instantly proposed that the two of them play a round for high stakes. Louis, madame, offered a diamond star—valued, perhaps, at fifty thousand francs, or more, against—"

"My glove."

"Even so. You have, perhaps, heard the tale?" queried the Duke, hastily, with a suspicion of anxiety in his voice.

Mme. de Châteauroux noticed this, but her face continued to be as impassive as that of her smiling mandarin. "You forget my evening, monsieur. I know nothing. Continue, I beg of you."

"Monsieur le Marquis de Coigny and the Comte de Maurepas!" announced the valet.

De Gêvres coughed, but his face expressed none of the disappointment that he felt.

Mme. de Châteauroux greeted both gentlemen with imperturbable courtesy, and the three nobles, after her salutes were over, exchanged greetings. Then the favorite said, at once:

"Pray be seated, messieurs. M. de Gêvres is telling me a most interesting anecdote. Pardon if I ask him to finish it. Since it in a way concerns myself, I am so vain as to be curious."

The late-comers bowed and looked at the Duke, who, in that instant, had mentally sounded the intruders, considered his course, and decided to risk a continuance of his original plan. Without any noticeable hesitation, the story went on.

"As I said, his Majesty and the Count de Mailly were to play together for possession of the glove. The King threw first—four and three. De Mailly came next with five and two."

"Ah!" murmured de Coigny.

"Again Louis with ten, and the Count turned precisely the same number. His Majesty was visibly tingling with anxiety. He was about to throw for the last time, with a prayer to the gods, when the Count—um—took pity on him."

"He offered the glove?" asked madame, quietly.

De Gêvres bowed. "In a way, Duchess. He offered to—exchange the stakes."

"Oh!" cried Maurepas, angrily.

"Dastardly!" muttered de Coigny.

Mme. de Châteauroux flushed scarlet with anger beneath her powder.

Little Marchon, trained to high gallantry by long experience in haunts of the elect, left an iron in too long, and slightly scorched a lock of hair. His little eyes winked furiously with disapproval of the Count.

"Monsieur le Marquis de Mailly-Nesle!" came the announcement.

De Gèvres coughed again; and, amid rather a strained silence, Henri entered the apartment of his sister.

He looked about him for a moment or two with some curiosity, feeling the awkwardness of his arrival, and considering what it would be wise to say. Maurepas, the diplomat, recovered himself quickly, remarking, in a tone which relieved them all: "This brother's devotion, my dear Marquis, is gratifying to behold. One is really never so certain of finding you anywhere at a given hour as here, in your sister's boudoir."

"Mme. de Coigny has, I believe, no mornings *à la toilette*," observed Mme. de Coigny's husband.

Maurepas looked sharply at the speaker, while the others smiled, and the Duchess made every one still easier by laughing lightly.

"Her *sang-froid* is unapproachable," murmured de Gèvres to Maurepas, behind his hand.

"You have certainly put it to strong test this morning," was the reply, rather coldly given.

"L'Abbé de St. Pierre and l'Abbé Devries!"

The two ecclesiastics entered from the antechamber and advanced, side by side, towards the Duchess. The taller of the two, St. Pierre, was a very desirable person in salon society, and could turn as neat a compliment or as fine an epigram in spontaneous verse as any member in the "rhyming brotherhood." At sight of St. Pierre's companion, who was a stranger here, the Marquis de Coigny gave a sudden, imperceptible start, and Henri de Mailly suppressed an exclamation.

"Madame la Duchesse, permit me to present to you my friend and colleague, l'Abbé Bertrand Devries, of Fontainebleau."

"I am charmed to see you both," deigned her Grace, giving her hand to St. Pierre, while she narrowly scrutinized the slight figure and delicate, ascetic face of the other young priest. The mild blue eyes met hers for a single instant,

then dropped uneasily, as their owner bowed without speaking, and passed over to a small sofa, where, after a second's hesitation, he sat down. St. Pierre, who seemed to cherish some anxiety as to his new protégé's conduct, followed and remained beside him.

"Unused to the boudoir, one would imagine. It is unusual for one of his order. I am astonished that St. Pierre should have brought him to make a *début* before you," observed de Gêvres to la Châteauroux, who had not yet removed her eyes from the new priest.

"St. Pierre knows my fondness for fresh faces," she replied, indifferently, picking up a mirror to examine the coiffure, just as her lackey entered the room with small glasses of *negus*, which were passed among the party.

While de Coigny raised a glass to his lips he turned towards Devries. "You have spent all your time in Fontainebleau, M. Devries?" he asked, seriously.

"By no means, monsieur," was the answer, given in a light tenor voice. "Indeed, for the last two weeks I have been working in Paris."

"Working! And what, if my curiosity is not distasteful to you, is your work?" queried madame, still toying with the mirror.

"By all means," murmured de Gêvres, comfortably, after finishing his mild refreshment, "let us hear of some work. It soothes one's nerves inexpressibly."

Devries' blue eyes turned slowly till they rested on the slender figure of the Duke, clad in his gray satin suit, his white hands half hidden in lace, toying with a silver snuff-box. The eyes gleamed oddly, half with amusement, half with something else—weariness?—disgust?—surely it was not ennui; and yet—in an avowed courtier, that was what the look would have seemed to express.

"I will, then, soothe your nerves, if you wish it, sir. My work certainly was very real. For the past two weeks my abode has been in the Faubourg St. Antoine, but my days were spent in a very different part of the city. At dawn each morning, in company with my colleague—

not M. de St. Pierre, here—I left behind those houses whose inmates rejoiced in clothes to cover themselves, in money enough to purchase a bone for soup daily, and who were even sometimes able to give away a piece of black bread to a beggar. These luxurious places we left, I say, and together descended into hell. It might amuse you still more, monsieur, to behold the alleys, the courts, the kennels, the holes filled with living filth into the midst of which we went. There women disfigure or cripple their children for life in order to give them a means of livelihood, that they may become successful beggars; there wine is not heard of, but alcohol is far commoner than bread; there you may buy souls for a quart of brandy, but must deliver your own into their keeping if you have not the wherewithal to appease, for a moment, their hatred of you, who are clean, who are fed, who are warm. Cleanliness down there is a crime. Ah! how they hate you, those dwellers in the Hell of Earth! How they hate us, and how they curse God for the lives they must lead! The name of God is never used except in oaths. And yet a girl, whose dying child I washed, knew how to bless me one day there. It seems to me that they might all learn how, if opportunity were but given them. There has been some bitter weather lately, when the frozen Seine has been a highway for tradespeople. Those creatures among whom I went make no change from their summer toilets, gentlemen. Half—all the children—are quite naked. The women have one garment, and their hair. The men are clad in blouses, with perhaps a pair of sabots, if they can fight well to obtain them, or are ready to do murder without a qualm to keep them in their possession. It is among these people that I worked, Monsieur—de Gêvres—with my colleague.”

“How eminently disgusting!” replied the Duke, calmly; but his remark was not pleasing to the rest of those present, who had been actually affected by the description. Henri de Mailly had risen to his feet, and, after a moment’s pause, asked, rather harshly, “Who was your colleague, monsieur?”

The Marquis de Coigny shot a quick, warning glance at Henri, and raised his hand. "Monsieur l'Abbé, I am interested in your story. Would you do me the honor to breakfast with me this morning, and tell me more of this life?"

The little audience stared, and la Châteauroux lifted her head rather haughtily. Devries appeared, for some reason, to be very much amused.

"You are too good, Monsieur le Marquis. I have already partaken of my morning crust. Besides, you, doubtless, are happy enough to be daily in the company of Mme. de Châteauroux; while I, monsieur, am a poor priest, not often admitted to the dwellings of the highest." He rolled his eyes towards the figure of the Duchess, who was becoming visibly gracious under the effect of this slight compliment.

"You are not, then, a sharer of the opinions of those poor creatures amongst whom you have worked, and who, as you truthfully suggest, have some little cause to hate us, who have so much more in life than they?" queried Maurepas, with the interest of a Minister of the Interior.

"No, monsieur, assuredly I have no feeling of enmity towards the nobility of France. I should have no right. You see, I know very—very lit—" Suddenly Devries caught the eyes of St. Pierre fixed on him in so curious a glance that he was forced to stop speaking. His mouth began to twitch at the corners. He shook with an inward spasm, and finally lay back upon the sofa, emitting peal after peal of silvery, feminine laughter.

"Victorine!" cried the Duchess, starting from her chair. "Victorine, you madcap! So you have come back again!"

"Mme. de Coigny insisted," murmured St. Pierre, uncertain of his position.

The rest of the gentlemen sat perfectly still, staring at the little Marquise, and trying, out of some sense of propriety or gallantry, to keep from joining in her infectious laughter. Only Henri de Mailly sat near a window, his head on his fist, staring gloomily out upon the barren, stone-paved court.

"My dear madame!" cried Maurepas, when she had grown tearful with laughter, "your disclosure has done me an excellent turn. It has saved me five hundred livres. I was about thus to impoverish myself that you might be permitted to get still closer to heaven by spending another week in the criminal quarter distributing them."

The Marquise de Coigny grew suddenly serious again. "M. de Maurepas, let me take you at your word. I beg that you will send the money to him who was my companion in the work—l'Abbé de Bernis."

"Oh!—François de Bernis?" asked St. Pierre, in quick surprise. "I have met him at the Vincent de Paul."

"Her Majesty, I believe, receives him at times into her most religious coterie," put in de Maurepas.

"Well, since you know who he is, I will continue, if you will permit me. I beg that you will all, at least, believe that what I have said concerning my occupation in Paris was wholly serious. Indeed, indeed, I am in the highest sympathy with the work of the Jesuit fathers among the people; and there are few men in our world whom I—respect—as I do M. de Bernis."

At these words, so solemnly spoken that they could not but impress the listeners with their sincerity, the eyebrows of St. Pierre went up with surprise, though he remained silent. As a matter of fact, the reputation of the Abbé François Joachim de Pierre de Bernis was not noted for its sanctity.

"Will you, then, permit me, madame, to double my first offer?" said de Maurepas, with his mind on the treasury. "I will to-day send you a note for one thousand livres, which I beg that you will dispense in charity."

"M. de Maurepas, I wish that you could imagine what your word will mean to those poor creatures."

"And shall you yourself return to Paris with the money, madame?" inquired de Gêvres, smiling slightly.

De Coigny moved as though he would speak, but his wife answered immediately, in his stead: "No, Monsieur le Duc. I have no intention of taking permanently

to a black gown. For two weeks it has occupied me satisfactorily to attend the poor. Now I shall come back to Court till I am again fatigued by all of you. After that I must devise a new amusement. Really—you all know my one eternal vow: I will not become successor to Mme. du Deffant. Death, if you like,—never such ennui as hers. M. de Mailly-Nesle, will you give—”

She did not finish. Henri had sprung quickly to his feet, but de Coigny was before him. “Pardon, Monsieur le Marquis,” said he, with great courtesy, “will you allow me, to-day, instead. To-morrow I shall once more relinquish all to you.”

De Mailly-Nesle could not, in reason, refuse the request, though it was against the conventions. He merely bowed as husband and wife, having variously saluted la Châteauroux and the rest of the company, passed together out of the boudoir.

“Mme. Victorine’s eccentricity and her terror of being bored are excellent things. The husband seems to fall in love with her more violently than ever after each adventure.”

“Ah, Madame la Marquise is too charming to be anything but successful everywhere. Really, Henri, you and de Bernis—”

Henri, angry at the first word, turned upon the Duke: “Monsieur, I would inform you that Mme. de Coigny is—”

“Oh yes, yes, yes! Pardon me,” de Gêvres rose, “I understand perfectly that Mme. Victorine is the most virtuous, as she is the most charming, of women. Madame la Duchesse, I have been with you seemingly but one moment, and yet an hour has passed. His Majesty will be receiving the little entries. I bid you *au revoir*.”

The Duchess held out her hand. The courtier kissed it, bowed to the three remaining men, and gracefully left the boudoir. When the door shut behind him a breath of fresher air crept through the room. Mailly-Nesle, who had been restlessly pacing round and round among the tables and chairs, paused. De Maurepas drew a



“CLAUDE—TAKE THIS AND THROW IT OUT—THERE”

tabouret to madame's side, and began to talk with her in the intimate and inimitably dignified manner that was his peculiar talent. St. Pierre was thoughtfully regarding nothing, when Henri approached and sat down beside him. Just as they began to speak together, Marchon stepped back a little from the chair of la Châteauroux.

"Madame," he cried, "the coiffure is finished."

At the same instant the door to the antechamber again flew open. "The Comte de Mailly!" announced the valet.

There was a second's pause and Claude ran into the room. "My dear cousin!" he cried, buoyantly, hurrying towards her.

Mme. de Châteauroux rose slowly from her place, stared at the new-comer for an instant with the insolence which only an insulted woman can use, then deliberately turned her back and moved across the room. Maurepas was already on his feet, and now, seizing his opportunity, he bowed to the woman, indicated Henri and the abbé in his glance, passed Claude with the barest recognition, and left the room congratulating himself on his adroit escape before the storm. Mailly-Nesle and St. Pierre sat perfectly still for an instant out of astonishment. Then, happily, the abbé came to himself, rose, repeated the performance of the minister, and hastened from the unpleasantness. The instant that he was gone Claude broke his crimsoning silence in a somewhat tremulous voice:

"Name of God, Marie, what have I done?"

Madame was at her dressing-table. Picking up a small mirror, she retouched her left cheek.

"Marie," said Henri, gently, "it is but fair that you let him know his fault."

A shiver of anger passed over the frame of la Châteauroux. Then, suddenly whirling about till she faced Claude, she whispered, harshly: "My gauntlet, Monsieur le Comte; my white gauntlet! Return it to me!"

Again Claude flushed, wretchedly, while his cousin spoke: "He has it not to return, Marie,"

She turned then upon her brother. "So you, also, know this insult, and you counsel me to—let him know his fault! Ah, but your school of gallantry was fine!"

"This insult!" repeated Claude, stupidly.

"Fool! Do you think I do not know it?"

Count and Marquis alike stood perfectly still, staring at each other.

"Your innocence is awkwardly done," commented madame. "Show me the price, Monsieur Claude, for which you sold my gage."

"Price!" echoed Henri, angrily. But Claude drew a long breath.

"Ah! Now I begin, I but begin, to understand. Which was it that came to tell the story, madame? Was it d'Epernon, or Gêvres, or Richelieu who twisted the account of a forced act into one of voluntary avarice?"

The favorite shrugged. "Charming words! I make you my compliments on your heroic air. Will you, then, confront M. de Gêvres before me?"

"Most willingly, madame! Afterwards, by the good God, I'll run him through."

La Châteauroux bent her head, and there was silence till she lifted it again to face her young cousin. His eyes answered her penetrating glance steadily, eagerly, honestly. And thereupon madame began to turn certain matters over in her mind. She was no novice in Court intrigue; neither had she any great faith to break with de Gêvres. It was a long moment; but when it ended, the storm was over.

"How did it happen, Claude?"

"I gave the gauntlet to the King, when, man to man, he was beaten at dice."

"You received nothing in return?"

Claude was uncomfortable, but he did not hesitate. "Yes," he said, with lowered eyes. "I have brought it to you. I hate it."

From one of the great pockets in the side of his coat he drew a small, flat box, which he handed to his cousin.

She received it in silence, opened it, and gazed upon the royal star. The frown had settled again over her face. Suddenly, with a quick impulse, she pulled open one of the small windows which looked down upon the Court of Marbles.

"Claude, take this and throw it out—there," she commanded.

De Mailly was at her side in two steps. Eagerly he seized the jewels and flung them, with angry satisfaction, far out upon the stones. La Châteauroux looked at him quizzically for an instant, then suddenly held out both hands to him. He did not fall upon his knee, as a courtier should have done; but threw his arms triumphantly about her and bent his powdered head over hers.

"Um," muttered Henri, indistinctly, "methinks I would better go and seek the fallen star."

CHAPTER III

The Gallery of Mirrors



THE 16th of January fell on a Saturday, on the evening of which day the King held his usual weekly assembly in the formal halls of the palace. These affairs were not loved by Louis, whose tastes ran in more unostentatious directions; but they were a part of his inheritance, coming to him with the throne, his hour of getting up in the morning, and the national debt; so he made no audible murmur, and ordinarily presented a resplendent appearance and a dignified sulkiness on these occasions. It was his custom to enter the Hall of Battles or the Gallery of Mirrors, in company with his consort, between half-past eight and nine o'clock. Since no courtier was supposed to make his entrance after the King, the great rooms were generally thronged at an early hour, and the first dance began at nine precisely.

At a quarter to seven on this particular Saturday, four candles burned in the Gallery of Mirrors, and their petty light made of that usually magnificent place a shadowy, dreary gulf of gloom. Ordinarily, at this hour, the salon was deserted. To-night, it appeared, one individual was unhappy enough to find the place harmonious with his mood. This solitaire, who had twice paced the length of the hall, finally seated himself on a tabouret with his back to the wall, and, leaning his head against a mirror, gave himself up to some decidedly uncomfortable thoughts. It was Claude de Mailly who was young enough and unwise enough to surrender himself to his mood in such a place, at such an hour. Only late in life does the courtier learn

how dangerous a thing is melancholy. Claude had not come to this yet; and for that reason, through one long hour, he remained in darkness, meditating upon a situation which he could not, or, more properly, would not, help. For Claude's eyes were well open to the precarious position into which he had got himself; they were open even to his more than possible fall. Nor was he ignorant of the direction in which salvation lay—the instant bending to Louis' wishes, repudiation of the favorite, and devotion to some other woman. But, to his honor be it said, Claude de Mailly was deeply enough in love and loyal enough by nature to scorn the very contemplation of such action. He could not see very far into the future. He dared not try to pierce the veil that hid the to-come from him. He would not think of consequences. Perhaps he was not capable of imagining them; for, to him, life and Versailles were synonymous terms, and the world beyond was space.

His vague and varied meditations were broken in upon by the appearance of eight lackeys, who had come to light the room for the evening. Claude rose from his place and slipped away by a side-door. He had nothing to do, nowhere in particular to go. The *Œil-de-Bœuf* would be deserted. The Court was dressing. An hour before, dismal with the loneliness of the gray sky and the falling snow, he had left his rooms in Versailles. He was dressed for the evening, but had had nothing to eat since the dinner hour. An idea came to him presently, and he bent his steps in the direction of the Staircase of the Ambassadors. At the head of this, on the second floor, he halted, knocking at a well-known door. It was opened after a moment by a well-known lackey. Claude thrust a coin into the man's hand, and passed out of the ante-chamber, through a half-lighted salon, and into the Persian boudoir where sat Mme. de Châteauroux and Victorine de Coigny, comfortably taking tea *à l'anglaise* together, and talking as only women, and women of an unholy but very entertaining Court, can talk. The little Marquise was dressed for the assembly. The duchess was coiffed,

patched, and rouged, but *en négligé*. She rose nervously at Claude's entrance.

"Claude! Claude! How unceremonious you are!"

"And did you hear what we were saying of you, monsieur?" asked Victorine, smiling mischievously, as she gave him her hand.

"Fortunately for my vanity, madame, no," he returned, bending over it; then, at her ripple of laughter, he crossed to his cousin, took her proffered fingers, but, instead of kissing them, seized them in both his hands, clasped them close to his breast, and looked searchingly into her eyes.

"Anne, Anne, I have suffered so!" he murmured. "I wonder—if you care?"

Mme. de Coigny sprang up. "At least, monsieur, give me time to retire! Your ardor is so remarkable!"

The Duchess laughed and gently withdrew her hand from Claude's grasp. She was in excellent spirits. Never had she passed a more uniformly successful week at Court than the one just ending. If she had purchased much royal devotion, and much toadyism from hitherto lofty personages at Claude's expense, why—that was Claude's affair. His career was not in her keeping; but she could, and did, treat him very amiably in private for the sake of the fierce jealousy which he was inspiring in her royal lover. It was one of her cleverest manœuvres, one that had been tried before, this playing some quite insignificant little person against Louis of France; for the King was ardently in love for the first time, and had not yet grown old in the knowledge of woman's ways.

"Come, Claude," entreated madame, "sit here, and take at least one dish of this charming beverage. And the patties are by Mouthier himself. You must taste them; and Mme. de Coigny shall entertain you, while my dress is put on."

He accepted the invitation readily enough, seated himself at the little table, and began an attack on Mouthier's patties with such good-will that Mme. de Coigny held up her hands.

"Ciel, Monsieur le Comte! Do you protest that you are a lover, with such an appetite? 'Tis more worthy the Court of Miracles!"

Claude put down his tea. "Ah, madame—the Court of Miracles! Do you know that for the last days I have heard nothing on every side but conversations about the last experiment of the Marquise de Coigny? May I ask if it proved a really successful remedy for your deplorable ennui?"

Mme. de Coigny slightly smiled. "Indeed, monsieur, its efficacy was but too great. At the time, I was in a dream of pity and of—happiness. Since my return, my wretchedness is greater than ever before. Pouf! How can you bear the air of this hideous place? It stifles! It poisons! It kills!"

"I hear," remarked Mme. de Châteauroux, from her toilet table, "that Griffet will, in a few days, formally present Monsieur l'Abbé de Bernis to her Majesty as eligible to the post of third chaplain to the Dauphin. Now, if it were desirable, it is possible that the King might"—she touched an eyebrow—"might be prevailed upon to ask him to supper with the royal family."

Victorine de Coigny moved uneasily, and Claude noted, from beneath his lids, that a sudden color, which did not quite match the rouge, had started into her face. "Do not jest, Marie," she murmured, half to herself.

"Oh, it is quite a possibility, my dear! If you ask it, I will—give him a salon here on a Tuesday evening. Will that please you? You will be able, then, to—"

Victorine sprang nervously to her feet. "Good Heaven, Marie! Do you not know that M. de Bernis considers me a man? How could you dream that I would wish him to know my sex? I—I beg of you—do not let me meet him here, or—or—if I should, at least you must disclose nothing. It would be too mortifying."

Mme. de Châteauroux paused in the manipulation of her gown to look at her friend. Never before had she beheld Victorine de Coigny in confusion; never had she seen her betray the smallest sign of emotion about any

thing or person. Claude also regarded her with unfeigned interest. Presently he turned slowly to his cousin.

"Madame," he said, softly, "why will you not make a pilgrimage with me into the Court of Miracles?"

"Dear Claude," she answered, smiling dreamily, "when I go there, I must carry with me only an image of—the King."

And, while Claude colored with displeasure, Victorine turned her head to hide an irrepressible smile.

By this time the candles in the great gallery were all lighted, and the mirrors reflected the brilliant colors of a richly costumed and continually increasing throng that passed and repassed in endless procession before them. No woman here was untitled; few of the men had less than five, and many had twenty, generations of unsmirched aristocracy behind them. Many were there who did not own the clothes upon their backs; and many others whose debts would have impoverished a half-dozen of the wealthiest of the bourgeoisie. Yet few ever went abroad with an empty pocket; and money was generally their last source of worry. Here passed the Marquis de Sauvré, a member of the King's intimate circle, a page of the Court, whose estates were mortgaged, and whose Paris *hôtel* was almost dismantled of furniture, in an unpaid-for dress of cherry-and-white satin, with pearls worth fifty thousand livres on him, arm in arm with M. de la Poplinière, a farmer-general, worth forty millions, but not attired with half the extravagance of his companion. In a corner, taking snuff, and commenting on the degeneracy of the grand manner since the last reign, were the old Duc de Charost, who had attached himself to the Queen and the religious party; the Duc de Duras, who lived on the influence of his wife's implacable etiquette; and M. de Pont-de-Vesle, a successful diplomatist in a small way, and the most disagreeably ubiquitous man at Court. Opposite them the Marquis d'Entragues, a man whose scutcheon had come into existence two hundred years before, beginning with a bar sinister to the discredit of a

certain King of France, and M. Marchais, at whose *hôtel* could be found the best *vin d'Ai* in the kingdom, and who was a favorite with Louis on that account, were discussing, with the Comtesse d'Estrades, the pompous intrigues of Mme. de Grammont. Every one waited, more or less eagerly, first, for the appearance of the favorite; secondly, for the arrival of the King.

"It is half-past eight," remarked de Coigny to Charost, whose group he had just joined. "I am unable to discover madame, my wife. She must be with Mme. de Châteauroux, who, by-the-way, is late."

"The Duchess is actually more haughty than la Montespan was," returned the old Duke. "The Fourteenth Louis showed less indulgence than his present Majesty."

"Possibly. But where is the favorite of the old Court with the presence, the magnificence, the carriage of the present Duchess?" cried Duras, popularly.

"Quite so," murmured Pont-de-Vesle, rubbing his chin.

"Well—yes. She has, perhaps, the manner," admitted Charost, unwillingly.

"And she is here!" cried de Coigny.

"Ah! What a carriage! What a glance! What a toilet!" cried Duras, rapturously.

"It is not difficult to perceive that she means, at all events, to wreck her cousin as she did the little d'Agenois."

"It is de Mailly's own fault, then. He is mad, to betray such devotion. One would never believe that he had been brought up at Court."

"You are quite right, M. de Charost. Such honesty and truth as his are absurdities that we do not often discover here," observed de Coigny, shrugging his shoulders.

The Duchess, handed by Claude, whose eyes were fastened on her, followed by Victorine and Henri de Mailly-Nesle, was entering the salon. The perfumed crowd, half unconsciously, drew back a little on either side to make a way for her as they did for the King. Her bearing was certainly royal. The heavy velvet of her robe,

with its glittering silver fern-leaves, swept about her like a coronation mantle. Her breast glittered with a mass of diamonds, and in her hair were five stars, fastened together like a coronet. She was turned slightly towards Claude, and noticed no one till he had finished what he was saying to her, so that all had time to note the manner of her entrance and the details of the costume. Then, as Richelieu pressed towards her, she gently dropped Claude's hand and turned aside.

He stood still for a moment where she left him, till he saw her quite surrounded with men and women. Then he moved away, dreading the next hour, but buoyed up with the thought of a promise she had given before they left her apartments. There were few people about him whom he did not know, and he bowed continually from right to left as he walked aimlessly through the throng. Oddly enough, however, as it seemed to him, the salutes that were returned were coldly formal. No one addressed him beyond a chilly "Good-evening," and Mme. de Grammont passed by with her eyes fixed on some distant goal. Claude's heart was beginning to throb a little, and he could feel the color surge over his face. Presently there was a touch upon his arm. Quickly he turned his head. M. de Berryer was beside him.

"Good-evening, M. de Mailly. Your face is troubled. In the midst of such a scene the expression is unusual. Am I impertinent to ask if I can be of service?"

Claude gave the man a quick and searching glance. "Yes," he said, after a pause, "you can tell me, if you will, your idea as to why I am in disfavor with—all these. And, also, if you will, answer this question: is my present position dangerous?"

They had drawn a little to one side of the greatest press while Claude spoke. De Berryer stopped an instant to think before he replied; but when he did so it was evidently with perfect honesty.

"My dear Count, you are experiencing these little and very disagreeable cuts, in my opinion, first, because of

your reckless attentions in spite of his Majesty's open displeasure; secondly, because of an unpleasant mistake in the story of your game with the King on Tuesday evening. The first matter you alone can rectify, but the method is simple. In the second, I will try to assist you. As to the—possible danger of your position—well, let me advise you to—do what may be done while it still is possible. Your pardon. *Au revoir.*”

The Chief of Police, bowing courteously, turned aside and was lost in the crowd before Claude could say anything further. To tell the truth, the last words had nonplussed de Mailly not a little. Presently, however, he flung up his head, and, passing his hand over his forehead, muttered to himself: “You may be right—God knows you may be right. But no honest man gives up the woman he loves because his rival is a king. And, from my soul, I believe that in time Marie must love me in spite of all!” And so the lights grew a little brighter as Claude passed on again through the Gallery of Mirrors.

It was a quarter to nine, and the company grew slightly bored. In three-quarters of an hour two hundred people can easily dispose of ten new scandals, redigest twenty ancient ones, and anticipate as many as the remaining minutes will permit. But undiluted gossip, spiced with epigram and heated with wit though it may be, grows nauseating after a while, if taken in too great quantities; and, through the great room, to-night, there were enough chronic dispeptics of this class to make conversation finally begin to lag. The abstract murmur, to which Claude was moodily listening, changed in character. Suddenly, as the cries of the ushers at last rang out, it became as present wine to former tepid milk:

“Mesdames, messieurs, their Majesties! Way for the King! Way for the Queen!—Will you have the goodness to move just here.”

The four royal ushers, with their white staffs, passed down the room, forming an alley for the passage of the King. No ribbons were used, as in the days of the four-

teenth Louis. The courtiers were better trained now. They pressed back voluntarily on either side, leaving a very well-formed lane between the two crowds. A quick silence fell over the room and the circling throng was still. Each one had sought the company in which he or she wished to stand. For none knew just how long it would take his Majesty to reach the other end of the room, where he would open the first minuet. Claude, by a series of delicate manœuvres, had reached the side of Mme. de Châteauroux, and, despite the silence, found opportunity to whisper:

"You will not forget—that you have promised me the first dance?"

And the favorite, looking into her cousin's eyes, felt, even in her heartless heart, a little throb of pity for the utter abandon of his infatuation.

"I do not forget, *mon cher*. But thou shouldst have kept away from me till the progress was over."

Claude shrugged and smiled happily.

"Mesdames, messieurs, their Majesties!"

Two more ushers entered and passed rapidly down the aisle, backward. Louis and his wife, hand in hand, followed after. The King was, as usual, magnificently dressed and glittering with jewels. His face, however, was as unpropitious as possible. He wore his most bored and fretful look, and he walked straight down the room for a distance of twenty-five feet, heedless of his wife, without glancing at a soul. Marie Leczinska, on the contrary, carelessly attired in a costume of deep brownish-red brocade, pale of face, tired-eyed, yet wearing a curiously contented look, bowed timidly to three or four of her *dames du palais* and some of her abbés, who had the grace to return the salutes with a show of respect that was born of pity. The company, however, quickly felt the chilling breath of the master's ill-humor.

"*Parbleu!*" muttered de Gêvres to Richelieu, as they stood together at the far end of the gallery, "madame herself is to be ignored to-night."

“HE SUDDENLY STOPPED AND TURNED HIS HEAD TOWARDS HER”



But the Duke was mistaken. His Majesty, in his rapid walk, had seen many more things than one might have imagined. He knew that Claude was beside the favorite, and he accurately surmised Claude's intent. Therefore, when he came abreast of the Duchess, who was not in the front row, he suddenly stopped, turned his head towards her, and remarked, in a perfectly expressionless tone:

"Mme. de Châteauroux, I have the pleasure of opening the dance with you to-night."

And before she had time to courtesy her thanks he had passed on again.

"Ah, de Gêvres, take note," murmured Richelieu, cautiously, "'tis two forms of the same expression that her Majesty and Claude de Mailly are at this instant wearing."

"You are right, my friend. You should propose something of the sort as the next subject for the competitive philosophical essay at the Academy."

"With whom do you dance?"

"The Princesse d'Hénin. And you?"

"I am going to bore myself for appearances. The Duchesse de Boufflers."

"Oh. You might amuse her, then, with some anecdotes of your past sanctity."

"She knows them too well. She will merely insist on talking to me of the frightful improprieties of Mme. de Coigny."

"Oh, by-the-way, as to that, I hear that de Bernis did not even know her sex."

"I have met him at Mme. Doublet's; and I give him credit for rather more brain than that."

"Really? In that case I must take the affair into my repertoire. M. de Mailly-Nesle will be able to weep in Claude's company."

"Such tears appear to run in the family. You've been rather unkind to Claude of late—and, moreover, it was dangerous to garble the story. His disfavor with la Châteauroux certainly did not last long."

"No—silly boy! Really, Richelieu, that little invention should have done him a good turn. If the Duchess had refused to speak to him for a week, he would have been saved. As it is—um—I am glad that my position is not his."

"Well, *au revoir*. I go to seek my *dame d'étiquette*."

"*Au revoir*. But oh! Richelieu! Remember, when you relate the tale, that it is not only from the affections of Mailly-Nesle, but from those of de Coigny himself, that the abbé is tearing the lady."

"What! Coigny in love with his wife?"

"Madly. Only it is with the most delicate unostentation in the world. He is perfectly *comme il faut*, and to general eyes devoted still to Mme. d'Egmont."

"A charming romance. Thank you, and farewell."

Richelieu hurried away, and de Gêvres also moved more rapidly than was his wont in search of his partner. While the hours of that long evening passed, the emotions varied with them. As la Châteauroux had her triumph with, so had her cousin his revenge upon, the King. The third dance—*menuet des sabres*—Louis performed with his wife. Under cover of imitating royalty, de Coigny sought Victorine for his companion. Henri, biting his lips, watched de Gêvres lead madame forth, and then, totally indifferent to every unengaged woman in the room, sought out his Marquise, who left M. Trudaine with a little laugh, and devoted herself prettily to the husband with whom she had, as she said, merely a casual acquaintance. Meantime the King was frowning furiously on the presumption of his still dauntless rival. For Claude, in the face of a dozen competitors, under the very shadow of a warning glance from de Berryer, which unmistakably spelled *lettre de cachet*, had, with scarcely so much as a by-your-leave, triumphantly carried his cousin off from her admirers to the head of the third twenty, and proceeded to make two wrong steps during the dance, much to the amusement of la Châteauroux and the disgust of the King: who, though France were tottering, had never been guilty of such a misdemeanor.

The grand supper, which began at midnight, was virtually ended at one o'clock by the departure of the King ; although Mme. de Châteauroux, at Richelieu's side, still stayed at table, and the Court, from curiosity, remained with her. There was a murmur, whether of disappointment or surprise, when the de Mailly cousins, Henri and Claude, with merely the customary salutes, passed together from the room. Five minutes later the Duchess, refusing escort, departed unattended, and the lingering Court, heartily sick of its own dull self, bored, sleepy, with aching eyes and feet, rose from the horseshoe table, and went its way to a dubious rest.

For an hour every apartment on the upper floors of the palace was ablaze with light. In the city of Versailles those streets which, during the great season, were the abodes of the lesser nobility, were still alive with coaches, chairs, and link-boys ; while not a window in any of the tall, narrow houses but glowed with the mild fire of candles. In one of these streets, the Avenue de St. Cloud, within the building called by its owner the Châtelet Persane, in half the apartment of the third floor, Claude and Henri kept rooms together. Just below them, more luxurious in fashion and less in content, were the court apartments of the Marquis and Marquise de Coigny.

Victorine, nearly ready for the night, with a silken *négligé* thrown over her elaborate white gown, sat before her dressing-table, brushing with her own hands the clouds of powder from her dark hair. This hair, comparatively short, according to the dictates of fashion, was still her only claim to beauty. Thus at night, when the soft, natural curls could cluster unreservedly about her pale face and neck, the little Marquise was far prettier than in the daytime. She was not beautiful even now. The mirror showed her a delicate, oval face, pallid and hollow-cheeked ; two abnormally large eyes, that were green and weary-looking to-night ; the brows above them lightly marked, and too straight to harmonize with her great orbs ; a nose delicate, short, and tilted piquantly upward—a feature

more worthy of a coquettish grisette than the daughter of one of the oldest families in France; and a mouth indefinite, long, pale, sometimes very full of character, that would have rendered Boucher and the miniature painters desperate.

Victorine had sent away her maid as soon as she was ready to sit down quietly. It seemed to her that, sleepy as the girl appeared, she would be able to read too much from her mistress's face, to see too far into her mind. Besides this, it was a relief to be alone. During the strange month which she had just lived, Mme. de Coigny had fallen suddenly in love with freedom. The suffering which she was enduring from bondage was the penalty she paid for her reckless wilfulness. But had it been ennui now, as of old, under which she chafed, she might have made further effort to dispel it by means of another of those startling escapades which, since she had amused the King with one of them, the Court had become reconciled to. This was not ennui, then. This, she thought vaguely, and with a kind of rebellion, was the haunting image of a single person, the unchanging recurrence before her mental eyes of a man's face—the face of François de Bernis, as she had seen it first a month since at Fontainebleau.

The brush in her hand had almost ceased to pass over her hair, and Victorine was staring fixedly into the mirror, without, however, seeing herself. Presently the door to her boudoir swung gently open. She started slightly and turned about in her chair. M. de Coigny, her husband, in his long lounging-robe of green and gold, stood upon the threshold. She regarded him silently. He hesitated for a moment, and then asked, deprecatingly:

“Will you perhaps be so gracious as to permit my entrance?”

“Certainly, Monsieur le Marquis, if it is your wish.”

“I thank you.”

He walked lingeringly into the delicate little place, and seated himself at some distance from her, upon a small chair. Then the silence fell again, lasting several seconds. Victorine waited; her husband was nervously

at a loss for words. Finally, seeing that she did not know how to help him, he began, in a low, impersonal tone:

"Madame, it is now four days since your return from your little journey to this abode, and—and to my nominal protection. During the month in which your place of retreat was unknown to me, I confess to having experienced extreme concern for your welfare. I believe that I have never spoken to you upon the subject of those short flights to freedom which, from time to time, you have been accustomed to take, in order to overcome, as I have understood, your always unfortunate tendency towards ennui. This one just passed, however, having been of so much longer duration than usual, I have taken the liberty of questioning your old servitor, Jérôme, whom you were so wise as to take with you as attendant. He has informed me that, so far as he has been able to determine, your conduct as regards any of my sex whom you chanced to encounter in that month, was eminently reserved and dignified. Upon this, madame, I venture to congratulate you. I have come to you to-night, however, with a proposal on which I have meditated carefully for some weeks. At first it will not improbably appear to you to be too unconventional and perhaps too uninteresting to be desirable; but I beg, for my sake as well as yours, that you will consider it from every point of view.

"I have thought, Victorine, that perhaps one reason for your carelessness about existence at Court was due to your entire indifference to any of the cavaliers there at your disposal. I should have surrendered my supposed rights to M. de Mailly-Nesle had I ever perceived that you desired him for your comrade. I have been impelled to the belief that you do not care for him. Therefore it is, madame, that I approach you to-night with the offer of myself to you, as devoted to you in heart and feeling, to be your companion as well as the protector of your name, or, as the Court understands the word, your lover. With this request I couple the assurance that my love and esteem

for you are now far stronger than two years ago, when we were united in marriage.”

The Marquise listened to this punctilious and delicate offer quite passively, with courteous attention, and no little amazement. When he had finished speaking, she sat for a little while contemplating him silently. He waited with patience while her eyes travelled over his stalwart figure and pleasant face. Finally, not without nervousness, she began her reply.

“M. de Coigny, I am now, at the beginning of our third year of marriage, eighteen years of age. Of course you remember how, for the first sixteen years of my life, spent in my family’s estate in Berry, I was carefully educated for the position which I now hold. All necessary accomplishments and the code of etiquette were perfectly familiar to me before that age; but there were some few things—essential ones—about Court life of which they did not inform me. Just after my sixteenth birthday I left the château for the first time in my life. I was conveyed by my guardian to Issy, where, fifteen minutes after I had first looked upon you, I found myself your wife. You will pardon me, I am sure, monsieur, when I say that my untried emotions were so strongly affected as to be, one might say, shocked. We returned to Versailles, you remember, where I was at once presented to their Majesties. In the two days which we had alone together I had had time to admire you, monsieur. It might have come to be more than admiration. When, however, upon my first evening in the palace, it was revealed to me, inadvertently, what your generally accepted position in regard to Mme. d’Egmont was, I bitterly regretted not having been taught more truly what I should have expected at this famous Court; and, at the same time, I hastened, out of duty, to stifle at once whatever feeling I had come to have for you in forty-eight hours. So successful was I, monsieur, that I have never since been troubled by any emotion for any living thing belonging to this city and palace of Versailles. Such, then, must

be my justification for the refusal of your very thoughtful offer. I can but thank you for it. I appreciate to the full the gallantry of your intended sacrifice; but I cannot permit you to make it. Believe me, monsieur, I must refuse."

The Marquis de Coigny had heard her in silence. Now, at the close of her unintentionally pitiful recital, he repressed an exclamation, and sat still, looking at her, for a long moment.

"How brutal I have been, Victorine!" he said, finally. "But I never realized. I never knew!"

His wife raised her hand. "Oh, monsieur, I beg of you, do not reproach yourself! I would not dream, indeed I would not, of blaming you in any way. It was only that I was young to the way of the world."

He looked at her again, with a love-light struggling to show itself in his face. "Victorine—can you not forget? Will you not let me try to make your life happy, now, at last?"

She returned his glance, and smiled, dreamily, as though her thoughts had flown far. "Monsieur, it is not in your power; for I am happy, now, at last."

The Marquis de Coigny rose. His face was passive. Only his mouth was drawn a little straighter than usual. His bow was in perfect form. "I have the honor to wish you good-night, Victorine."

The Marquise courtesied. "Good - night, Jules," she said, kindly.

He was at the door when he suddenly, moved by strong feeling, turned about again. She was looking at him. Their eyes met, and the glances clashed. Silently she courtesied again; and, in silence, once more, the Marquis bowed and turned away.

CHAPTER IV

Marly



ON Monday afternoon, at half-past five o'clock, in a small room in the Lazariste, which was next to St. Vincent de Paul in the Rue de Sèvres, sat François de Bernis, Abbé Coyer, and St. Perle, the Lazariste prior, taking tea. The Abbé François de Bernis wore, over his non-clerical court-dress, a long, straight black coat, which did not set off to advantage his dark, handsome face, straight brows, nose, and mouth, smooth olive complexion, and deep gray eyes. His wig was short and round. His hat and gauntlets lay on a chair near at hand. Coyer, a weaker replica of his brother abbé, was in much the same costume, which denoted an approaching journey; while St. Perle, stout, round, pale-eyed, bald, and wigless, was in his usual priestly gown.

The prior had finished his second bowl of tea, and sat absently meditating on the excellence of its flavor. It was not a thing of which he partook daily. De Bernis lay back in his chair, the dish in his hand steaming unheeded, legs crossed, eyes staring into space, and a smile stretching itself over his countenance.

"Thy thought, François! I would give something for the recipe of that smile at Mme. de Tencin's. I might tell what tale I liked to explain it, and they would credit every word."

De Bernis returned to the present, and directed the smile at his two companions. "It is a tale," said he. "A very charming tale. However, our coach will have arrived before I have finished it with proper adroitness."

"The coach shall wait."

"Ah, my dear Coyer, 'tis not the first time that you will have made your bow to his Majesty and to the favorite. Consider my agitated eagerness."

"The *sang-froid* of M. de Bernis is known to be imperturbable," ventured the prior.

"And your appearance at Marly will be infinitely more important if you show yourself indifferent enough to be late."

De Bernis shrugged. "Very well, then. My history will—disappoint you. It might be so charming a romance. It is, in reality, so unfinished. However—I will be truthful.

"It began upon a certain morning five weeks past, the week of Christmas, when, as you know, I was at Fontainebleau. At ten of the morning I started out, on foot, my destination being the hut of one of the forest-keepers, my road through the forest's centre. I had some *écus* in my pouch, together with some food and some medicine of herbs, for the woodsman was wedded and was poor. The morning was frosty. There was some little snow on the ground, and here and there a wolf-track. I went slowly, composing consolatory speeches, and meditating—on holy matters. Presently I looked up, with the sense of some one near, to find myself facing a companion of the vows, dressed like myself. I stopped, saluted, and bade him good-morning. He returned my greeting in a pretty tenor voice, unusually high. I looked again at the man's face. It was peculiar, but pleasing—small, oval, white, and smooth. He was very young, and his eyes were remarkably large and blue. He had been fasting, I thought."

Coyer laughed.

"Each day," continued de Bernis, retrospectively, without heeding the interruption—"each day thereafter, by one chance or another, we met. I am not quite sure how. M. Devries seemed to be under no particular order of procedure, and so, at my invitation, he made himself my companion

in charitable rounds. Daily I became more interested in him by reason of his reticence respecting himself; and, after a time, I fell completely under the spell of fascination emanating from his voice and his manner. By the time we set out together for Paris, and before my first suspicion of his personality came to me, my inexplicable infatuation had risen to great height. At the inn in Fontainebleau, on the Paris road, and again at the lodging that he, oddly enough, chose to take in the Faubourg St. Antoine, there was always in attendance upon my companion an old and very respectful man called Jérôme. When we passed the Paris barrier I overheard this servant, in a whispered communication, address Devries in a word which sounded strangely like 'madame.'"

Here St. Perle started with surprise, and Coyer took snuff with a little impatience at the coup anticipated by him from the beginning.

De Bernis went on tranquilly: "At that instant all my vague conjectures and my unconscious suspicions suddenly leaped together into a certainty of knowledge. Need I add, my friends, that, as a man and a poet, I was disgusted with all the lost opportunities, but still enraptured with the glowing future? But, alas! I soon discovered that my goddess—M. l'Abbé Devries, as I punctiliously called her—was as unapproachable as she was irreproachable. This I came to realize gradually, and by means of repeated failures in small advances. I was still, fortunately, too careful to betray myself. It was she who proposed our pilgrimages into that most unsavory of holes, the Court of Miracles. Naturally I acquiesced, with the utmost eagerness, to the proposal of continuing in her society for two weeks more. From here I went for her every morning. I left her every evening to return hither. By degrees I became madly in love with her mystery, and so, at length, with herself, for her self's sake. I would have squandered all my small fortune for a sight of her without her abbé's dress. At every turn I was foiled, either by her or by her guardian.

the incorruptible Jérôme. At last, a week ago, I became rash through desperation. I frankly approached this M. Jérôme, offered him one hundred louis d'or for her name, and five hundred if he would admit me secretly to her presence that evening. Actually the fool refused me—refused me stolidly, and at length with so much vigor of purpose that I desisted from the attempt. The next morning—the next morning—by ten thousand devils!—she was gone! I know not how, I know not where. I know not if the old man warned her of danger in my presence, or if she went of her own adorable accord. In fine, I love the lady abbess of an undreamed-of convent, I love a mad-cap demoiselle of I know not what château, the siren of an undiscovered Venusberg, the angel of a heaven too high. Now, Coyer, you have learned the romance. Show me, if you have pity for the stricken, the road—to knowledge and to recovery.”

At the close of his recital de Bernis' expression did not accord with his words. His tone was irritated, and the displeasure in it was caused as much by the failure of Coyer to appear interested as it was that the relation of his adventure recalled his hopeless defeat at the hands of a member of the sex over whom de Bernis loved to feel himself conqueror. Therefore he finished his tea in silence, and took three hasty and inelegant pinches of snuff.

St. Perle was troubled at the doubtful propriety of the story related, in which he had been too much interested to refuse to listen. He now folded his hands resignedly, and meditated a little lecture to come a day or two hence.

The Abbé Coyer was still indifferent, or apparently so. He stirred his tea and stifled a yawn before he remarked, casually: “Your road to knowledge, de Bernis, is also that to Marly, where I trust you will recover your *sang-froid* in the presence of your inamorata, who happens to be Mme. la Marquise de Coigny. You will meet her to-night. Come, the coach is at the door.”

His Majesty, who had been more than usually bored

during the past week, occupied his mind during the Sunday-morning sermon in thinking over all the grievances of kingdom, the uselessness of affairs of state, and the possibilities of some amusement on the morrow as recompense for the prayers of to-day. In the afternoon he sought his Châteauroux, and, happily finding her Claudeless, asked her aid in planning a diversion. Madame, with more tact than originality—in which factor her nature was lacking—proposed a hunt at Sénart in the morning, a sleighing-party from the forest to Marly in the afternoon, a supper and salon at that stiff château in the evening. His Majesty received the idea graciously, since it did away with any possibility of morning mass; and so, though he remarked later that he preferred Choisy to Marly, and madame alone to madame's salons, the programme was carried out as arranged, and the King seemed, in the morning at least, to be having a very good time, indeed.

Late in the afternoon a long procession of sleighs stopped, one by one, at the open portals of the great Louis' favorite retreat. Their occupants were chilly, tired, and hungry. Nevertheless, the Salle des Cardinaux presented a brilliant appearance when, an hour later, the company descended, in fresh and costly toilets, from the upper chambers to the supper-room.

The first course of the evening meal was served at six. It was a less elaborate affair than had been the custom under the old régime; but surely no man who had not inherited the appetite of a Louis XIV. could have complained of a scarcity in the number of dishes set forth. The company had apparently forgotten its weariness. The room rang with laughter; the air was alive with conversation, with toasts, with the relating of anecdotes, with snatches of verse, with low-voiced compliments; and the candle-light was dimmed by the flash of diamonds and the sparkle of champagne.

At the head of the first table sat the King—kingship dropped for the evening. Upon his right hand, more royal than her liege, was the Châteauroux; on his left, through

some whim of his own devising, sat Mme. de Gontaut, who had once rivalled the Duchess for her position, and came dangerously near to winning it. Louis was supposed to be not over-fond of this lady, who possessed that worst of all feminine attributes, an indiscreet tongue. But to-night he was fanning her long-smouldering hopes with such a breeze of devotion that the Duchess, seeing, first of any, the newly rising flame, openly showed her anger and disgust by turning her back upon the King to talk inanities with d'Epernon, her neighbor.

By the time that the first course was over madame was exceedingly uncomfortable. Never, since the beginning of her reign, had she known the King to treat her so inconsiderately. Once or twice, from beneath her eyelids, she glanced at her rival. Mme. de Gontaut was radiant. She was racking her brain, she was tearing her nerves, to keep Louis entertained for an hour—one little hour—more. She was not a pretty woman, this Gontaut; but Marie Anne de Mailly perceived, with a pang, that she could carry off a kind of light *espièglerie*, which was amusing to the King because of its novelty. The glance of the Châteauroux shifted to Louis' face. His Majesty was leaning to the left, his blue eyes brilliant, his lips curved into the most charming of smiles, his hands, which sparkled with jewels, lying close beside those of the other woman. La Châteauroux forgot d'Epernon while she watched the hands. The King drummed lightly on the table. He was repeating an animated bit of gossip to his companion. His head was thrown back, and a curious smile lurked in his face. Presently his eyes, also, fell upon his hand. One of the rings that he wore was a solitaire ruby of great value, set in a band of finely chased gold. Still smiling, he slipped the ring from his finger, and contemplated it for an instant, knowing well how two women were watching him. He was not usually prodigal of gifts, this most Christian king. But this time there was a score to be paid off, a score of jealousy; and revenge is worth more than rubies. Louis leaned forward, still speaking, gently took Mme. de Gon-

taut's hand from the table, and slipped upon its third finger the ring he had been wearing.

"Oh, Sire!" murmured the woman, her heart throbbing with a wild hope.

Louis, unable to resist the temptation, turned his head towards the Duchess. She sat so that he could only see her profile, but from it he knew that her face was flushed. He noted the stiff poise of her head, the pure immobility of her shoulder, the slight dilation of her nostril, the mouth firmly closed even while she smiled at a witticism. Louis was satisfied. His anger with Claude de Mailly was dispelled. Surely no woman would have the effrontery longer to encourage a petty cousin while her position wavered in the balance. Already the King released the hand he held and took a different tone of conversation with the Gontaut.

But Louis of France did not yet realize what things an offended woman will be reckless enough to do. Mme. de Châteauroux was furious, and her fury knew no prudence. She was accustomed to her way, a way which was not that of submission. Her pride was greater than the King's own, and woe to the king who affronted it! In the instant after she had watched Louis' carefully prepared scene, her eyes fell, by accident, on the figure of Claude, who sat far down the table. The sight of him showed her her opportunity for satisfaction. While she ate, while she laughed, and talked, and quaffed champagne and the new Bordeaux, she planned all in her mind. What matter if she lost one man his freedom? She, Marie Anne de Mailly-Nesle, would make a king suffer the consequences of his malice, and would once more make sure of her own place, her position as Queen of France.

At eight o'clock the King rose from the table. Generally speaking, the supper had not been particularly enjoyable. Every one was wearied by the long drive, and a long continuance of gayety over the food proved impossible. Besides this, the favorite had not set the tone of conversation, and those who knew her expression were aware that

she was in the worst possible humor. Mme. de Gontaut was displaying her short triumph so openly that his Majesty frowned and actually left her side as the company adjourned in informal groups to the salons next the banquet-room. Mme. de Châteauroux, still assiduously attended by d'Epéron, sought out Victorine de Coigny, who stood beside Henri de Mailly-Nesle. The little Marquise very well knew the reason for this meeting, and she was suddenly seized with a chill of terror. Looking up at her friend, she found the Duchess's eyes fixed on her in kindly interest.

"He will be here?" she breathed, just audibly.

The Duchess nodded and smiled. "With Coyer. It was my command," she answered. And Victorine, impulsively seizing her hand, carried it to her lips.

Once in the Salon Pastorale, with none of those salutations to members of the royal family or guests of royal blood which were invariably expected, at a Versailles' affair, to be made, the King, contrary to his first purpose, but led irresistibly, made his way to the side of Mme. de Châteauroux. She and Victorine stood near the doorway, talking with a small company of Louis' intimates. There was some slight apprehension in the King's manner of approach, for la Châteauroux very rarely concealed any displeasure that she might be feeling towards him. But this time he was received by a pretty gesture of welcome. Louis kissed her hand, and, as he lifted his head again, caught sight of some one at the other end of the room who arrested his attention.

"Since when, Madame," he inquired, "have our assemblies in retreat been frequented by members of the clergy?"

La Châteauroux was in no way disturbed by the tone. "Have you forgotten, then, Sire, my request that M. de Bernis be presented by the Abbé Coyer, who brings him to-night? De Bernis was one of the protégés of the Cardinal Fleury. I thought that, in such case, his appearance before you could not be dis—"

"Enough, enough, Anne," interrupted the King at once, with the strangely gentle manner which the mention of his former preceptor and minister invariably called forth. "I shall be delighted to know M. de Bernis."

The King failed to perceive the glances that passed from man to man about him at the words of the Duchess. Neither was he aware of the fact that de Bernis' presentation at Court had been delayed for eight endless years because the flagrant irregularity of his life had so displeased Fleury that the Cardinal had refused to give this priest an entrée to the circle of the Queen, whom he respected, or to that of the King, whom he loved. Mme. de Châteauroux was perfectly aware of all this; but Fleury had been dead a year, and any qualms that she might otherwise have felt were lost in the interest of watching the face of Victorine de Coigny, who had just perceived the approach of the new-comers.

At Louis' consent to the presentation, Mme. de Châteauroux had at once sent a message of the eyes across the room to Coyer, who was waiting for it. After an instant the two priests moved forward, slowly, side by side, towards the royal group, de Bernis with his eyes anywhere but upon the face of Victorine. The Duchess, with an adroit grace, moved a little in front of his Majesty, who was chatting with Richelieu. Thus she was the first to receive the two. After a cordial greeting to Coyer she turned, with some curiosity, upon his companion, to find de Bernis' sharp gray eyes fixed upon her in an admiring gaze that was but just removed from an affront. Curiously enough, however, the Duchess failed to resent it. Her deadened nerves vibrated at the glance with a sensation so long unfelt that it was a keen pleasure. Certainly the man had a fascination about him. She smiled slightly, and then Coyer, who had been awaiting the right moment, presented the Abbé in punctilious form.

"His Majesty had graciously expressed a desire to meet you," said the Duchess at once, turning slightly towards the King.

Louis, who was impatient to have done with the ceremony, stepped to her side.

"Your Majesty," murmured madame, "Monsieur l'Abbé de Bernis has the extreme honor of being presented to you."

The King extended his hand, which de Bernis, with a low and graceful salutation, received upon the back of his and lifted to his lips.

"Any man who had the great good-fortune to be beloved by the Cardinal Fleury, Monsieur l'Abbé, cannot but be at all times welcome at our Court," remarked the King.

A look of astonishment passed over the abbé's face. He shot a glance at the Duchess, who appeared perfectly unconscious. Nevertheless he was too keen a man to allow himself to fall into a mistake so early. "Your Majesty does me honor," he replied, in the slightest possible confusion.

"Not at all," returned Louis. "I am honoring the memory of my good friend Fleury, whose death—France and I—have cause to regret—more than any other event—of the reign."

With this scarcely audible reminiscence, his Majesty, in one of his peculiar moods, turned again to Richelieu, thus putting an end to the audience. Once or twice during the next ten minutes Louis glanced a little impatiently towards the favorite, with whom he wished to speak alone; but she and the abbé were engaged in a conversation which appeared to be absorbing to both. Presently the Duchess advanced a little and touched the shoulder of the Marquise de Coigny. Victorine turned with nervous quickness. Her delicate face was flushed and her hands were cold.

"M. de Bernis, will you allow me to add to your acquaintance the Marquise de Coigny, who will, I think, become your conductress for the evening, if you desire to meet others here; or your spirit of conversation, if you do not. Madame, I intrust the abbé's happiness, for the evening, to you."

De Bernis bent over Victorine's hand. "Would that

my life's happiness were as secure," he murmured. And a quick light came into the woman's eyes.

"To which lady will you be presented next?" she inquired, laughingly.

"To none, madame, if you are merciful," was the reply, accompanied by one of those looks upon which de Bernis came afterwards to depend for many things. "Dare I ask that you will grant me an hour of your companionship?"

Mme. de Coigny refrained from saying how many hours of companionship she would have granted for the asking; but her reply was certainly gracious enough to content him, and, a moment later, they moved slowly away from the royal group.

Meantime, by means of Richelieu's ready tact, the knot of courtiers about the King had been dispelled, and Louis was left alone with la Châteauroux. His Majesty watched the movements of his favorite comrade with a quizzical eye; and when the doughty Duke was obliged to carry off Mme. de Gontaut by making her his own companion, the King, with huge relish, took snuff.

Mme. de Châteauroux posed beside a heavy portière of yellow and gold, with which her own dress of palest blue satin mingled harmoniously. In the candle-light her face was perfection itself, and her manner and expression of quiet indifference were intensely pleasing to Louis, who was tired of the efforts at talking made on his behalf. He did not now approach her closely, but remarked in a half-whisper, from where he stood:

"Madame has been very cruel of late. The time, and especially the place, are unsuited to proper expression of my lasting esteem. Will madame be so generous as to receive me in her own apartments? The heat and the people here are highly annoying."

"If your Majesty commands," returned the Duchess, without moving, "I can, of course, but obey. Otherwise, I would suggest that your Majesty remain here for at least an hour longer. At that time a disappearance would be less remarkable."

The King sighed. "As you please—always as you please, Anne. But I am wretchedly bored with all this."

"Allow me to advise your obtaining the services of Mme. de Gontaut in dispelling your ennui," returned madame, coolly.

The King laughed. "Ah! you failed to understand my attention, I think. I made a fool perform for your benefit, that you might perceive how little any woman besides yourself could possibly please me."

The Duchesse de Châteauroux shrugged her shoulders.

"*Au revoir*—in an hour."

"*Au revoir*."

With a bow and smile peculiarly his own, Louis moved away in the direction of the little salon, and madame turned about to find Claude de Mailly close at her side.

"Dear Claude! Where have you sprung from?" she asked, smilingly.

"I have been hoping all day that you might deign to speak to me. You have been very cold of late."

She looked down upon him, and the smile died from her lips. "It is you who have made me so. Surely you must have realized, cousin, that you have been near to wrecking your own position."

"My position is nothing to me, except when it enables me to be near to you."

"Then let me tell you, Claude, that were you not indiscreet you might see far more of me than you do now."

"How—how—what shall I do?"

Madame turned away for an instant, and a resolution came into her eyes. "It is difficult, my Claude, to talk seriously with you here. I wish to see you happier. Listen. In three-quarters of an hour go to my apartments. Antoinette will let you in. There, when I can escape from this, I will come to you, and we shall have a little consultation. You shall lay bare your heart to me, if you will; and I—will turn adviser."

Claude seized her hand. "You will do this? You will let me tell you all? You will listen to what I shall

plead for? My God! It is more than I could have hoped. Marie, Marie—I shall make you believe me, I shall make you consent!”

“Chut! Some one will hear you, my child. There, that is enough. Remain here while I go. Behold, de Gêvres is coming. *Au revoir*, then.”

She parted from him with a smile as easy as that with which she had begun the conversation. What was one to think of her? A woman without heart, nerves, senses? No. Only a woman of the Court, a woman of the world; a woman whose heaven was Versailles, whose god was called Louis XV., whose hell would be dismissal with ten thousand livres a year.

Claude stood looking after her as she gave her hand to the lisping Duke; and then, tingling with excitement, with delight, with hope, with faith in his words and in her, the boy started upon the way she had pointed out to him. He went slowly across the room to the spot where stood Henri and a little group of ladies and gentlemen. He laid his hand upon the Marquis' arm and drew him a little away from the rest. Henri looked with curiosity and surprise upon his comrade's excited face, the brilliant green of his eyes, and the spasmodic manner in which he breathed.

“What is it, Claude? You look as though you had an inspiration, or were about to be seized with an illness. You have had too much champagne.”

“Henri, I am about to be the happiest man in ten thousand worlds. Henri, will you pray for the spirit of eloquence to seize me? For one half-hour I would be a Bosquet, a Molière, a Racine! Henri, have you ever heard me talk well? No. I have not—”

“Name of a devil, Claude, what is the matter?”

“Nothing. Nothing. Never mind. Good-night!”

He started away, but his cousin darted after him and caught him by the arm. “See here, my friend, you would better let me accompany you to your room. You must not make a scene. I cannot imagine how you—”

Before Henri finished Claude broke into a laugh. "Mordi, Henri, didst think me mad? I am a trifle excited. I am weary from the hunt—what you will. I am going to retire. Do not disturb me to-night. See, there is Mlle. d'Argenson regarding me. Let me go at once. There. Good-night!"

After these words the Marquis paused more contentedly, and saw his cousin leave the room, going in the direction of the grand staircase. On his way Claude passed the King, who was with Mme. de Jarnac, and the Duchess, still with de Gêvres. He left the second salon behind and entered an antechamber opening upon the central hall. Here, quite alone, side by side in the shadow of a hanging, were Victorine de Coigny and François de Bernis. The Abbé was toying with her fan, and laughingly answering her animated questions and observations. De Mailly took mental note of her face as he bowed in passing. Never had he seen it so absolutely free from discontent or that little look of fretful weariness that neither Henri nor de Coigny himself had ever been able to dispel. Now Claude had left them behind, and the staircase was before him. Ascending rapidly, he passed along the corridor above to the old apartments of de Maintenon. He knocked, was admitted without delay, and conducted, by Antoinette, into the inner room.

"Monsieur le Comte will wait here. He is early," she said, as she slipped away.

In the centre of the room in which he was left stood a round table. To this Claude drew a chair, seated himself, and then, obeying an impulse, leaned forward on the mahogany and laid his head upon his arms. Minutes passed, and he distinguished them neither from seconds nor from hours. After a time the maid once more went through the room. There was the murmur of a phrase or two spoken in the antechamber, a door softly opened, the delicate swish of satin, and then Claude was upon one knee at the feet of his cousin of Châteauroux.

She raised him up and smiled slowly into his brilliant

eyes. "You are tired of waiting, and, indeed, I do not wonder. But I have not been able to effect my disappearance till now. 'Toinette will bring a *pâté* and a glass of wine to us here, which we will take together, not as cousins, Claude, but—"

"As lovers," he murmured.

She shook her head at him. "As very good friends, my dear."

"Ah, no—Anne, no! Surely you could not think when you had granted me so much—so much as this—that I would not dare more—would not risk all, at last—"

"Chut! Stop, Claude! Why, would you finish our colloquy in a word? We have much time before us. To hurry is ungraceful."

He flushed and laughed at the same time. Happily at that moment Antoinette and Fouchet, the valet, entered together, the man bearing their repast upon a silver tray. While the dishes were being set out madame moved leisurely over to her toilet-table for a fan, and Claude sat silent till they were alone again.

"And now, my Claude, you will pledge me in a glass of this wine of Champagne. See—to thee, and me, and our house, Claude! Come—drink!"

Was madame suddenly nervous? Claude heard her voice tremble, and thought that her hand shook as she raised the delicate crystal goblet, with its tracery of golden grapes and vines, filled to the brim with that foaming gold which the court of the fifteenth Louis knew so well.

"To you, Anne! Only to you!"

The glass was at his lips, and he drank the toast with his soul in his eyes. He was blind; he was deaf. He did not hear that sound in the neighboring room that had stopped his companion's hand and fixed her eyes. The door to the boudoir was thrown violently open, and, at the same instant, there was the crash of glass on the floor.

"Diable!" cried a peculiar voice; and then a silence, thick, terrifying, fell upon the little room.

Slowly, so slowly that the woman was fascinated with

the sight, Claude carried the glass from his lips back to the table. His eyes had met those of the King, and both men hung to the glance. The boy rose, his limbs as steady as his hand had been. And still no one spoke. Mme. de Châteauroux was not acting now. Claude had not seen her first terror, but he knew when her hand crept to her mouth, perceived the trembling of it, heard dimly the sharpness of her breathing. Finally her voice came to him as if from a great distance, as she faintly said:

"I had not—expected—your Majesty—so early."

"So early, madame," echoed the royal voice, suavely. "And does Mme. de Châteauroux now make appointments for her evenings by the hour?"

Claude shut his teeth. "Sire, you insult my cousin!"

Mme. de Châteauroux started unfeignedly, and Louis' face flushed. His tone, however, was unmoved, as he said, slowly:

"Madame, order this person to leave the room."

La Châteauroux hesitated for the fraction of a second. Then she turned to de Mailly. "Monsieur," she said, "do you need further—"

But before she could finish Claude took the affair into his own hands. Moving until he stood between her and the King, and looking straight into her now impenetrable face, he spoke:

"Anne, when I came here to-night, I think you must have known what it was to say; and you will let me speak it now. Anne—I love you. I love you more dearly than anything upon earth. I offer you what I have to give—marriage, and the devotion of my life. You have been mistress of France, but I offer you an honester home, one in which you may obtain absolution. Choose, then, here and now, between us two. I ask that the King, as a man, will allow that choice—between marriage with me and freedom to live where we choose, or—the other life."

In the stillness which followed Louis de Bourbon glanced from the woman to the speaker and back again. Truly, the boy had courage, but something lacked in wit. Then

the King felt for his snuff-box, opened it, smiled leisurely, took a pinch in his fingers, and, before absorbing it, remarked, dryly:

“Choose, madame.”

La Châteauroux bent her head. It was not what she had planned, this situation. She herself it was who was bearing the difficult and the despicable part in it; for madame was but twenty-seven, and had still traditions of the family honor clinging to her. The answer came as though it cut her a little to speak her words, there, with the King's cynical eyes upon her, and all Claude's young, mad hope in his face:

“Claude—I wish you—good-night. Will your Majesty do me the honor to take a glass of wine?”

CHAPTER V

The Chapel



TUESDAY morning at Marly proved an ordeal for the army of valets and maids attendant on the ladies and gentlemen who had taken part in the amusement of the day before. His Majesty, indeed, could not be said to have set a good example to his companions. He was sulky, he was depressed by the weather, and he wanted de Berryer. While he was still in bed he was informed by de Rosset, his first gentleman, that the Chief of Police could not possibly be brought to Marly from Versailles under six hours. Louis made no comments, but kicked the bedclothes aside and began to dress himself with extreme rapidity, receiving his garments as willingly from the plebeian hands of Bachelier as from those of de Rosset, whose business it was to conduct matters properly. Being finally arrayed in a very much shorter time than usual, the King adjourned to the conventional room and sat down to the breakfast prepared for him. After gloomily striking off the tops of his eggs, dipping a bit of bread into each yolk, and throwing the rest away, till he had demolished seventeen of these commodities, without eating what one would contain, he ordered his sleigh prepared, and, at nine o'clock, left Marly behind, and set off at full trot for Versailles.

Behind him, at his grandfather's stiff old château, Louis left a pretty disposition of human emotions. Mme. de Châteauroux was very anxious. The more she brooded over the scene of the night before, the more she regretted the affair. Certainly it had turned out as badly as possible. Claude was inevitably ruined. He must by now have dis-

covered how heartless and how cruel she was; and as to Louis being more jealous, and therefore more anxious to please her than before, why, that was a doubtful question. He could be very ambiguous when he chose.

As a matter of fact, Claude himself was less concerned at his position than his cousin for him. Claude had much, and, at the same time, little, to lose at Court. His love was strong, but his youthful buoyancy of spirit was stronger. He was young, happy-hearted, untrammelled. There was no one dependent on him for place. He would have passed the Bastille doors without grief had it only been promised him that Henri should visit his room there once a week with the latest stories and gossip, and that the Doublet-Persane *Nouvelles à la Main* and a billet from his lady should reach him every Wednesday and Saturday. This was not more on account of his frivolity of taste than because of his ability to make for himself a home and amusements out of the most unpromising material. He was blessed with two things, that only the gods can give and the gods only take away—a system of pure optimism and unbounded faith in the goodness of human nature.

Claude by no means lay awake during the hours that were left between his retirement and the dawn, on that night at Marly; but his eyes unclosed in the morning more heavily than was their wont, and it took him but a second to define the sense of weight at his heart when he was awake. Sounding the hand-bell for his man, he made a rapid and silent toilet, and then hastened off to the neighboring apartment of his cousin the Marquis. Henri was in bed, still in that dream-stage between sound slumber and preliminary yawns. Claude's repeated and vigorous knocks at the door succeeded at last in bringing him to a realizing sense of all that is disagreeable in life.

"Diable! Is it you, Chaumelle? What do you mean by rousing me at this hour? Is the château on fire? Is the King ill—or Anne in a temper? Wait—wait—wait! I open!"

The Marquis, shivering with cold, crept out of bed and unlocked his door.

"Oh! You, Claude! I might have guessed it. One's family is so inconsiderate. Will you come in? I'm going to bed again to keep myself warm. For the love of Heaven, get Chaumelle to bring a tripod of charcoal or to light my grate here!"

Claude obligingly sounded the gong, whereupon the Marquis' man appeared with admirable promptness.

"Run to my room, Chaumelle, and bring in the chauffier you will find there. His Majesty's too tender of his forests to provide us with wood for burning. It's abominably cold."

The valet hurried away, to return in three minutes gingerly carrying by its handles a tripod filled with glowing charcoal, that gave out a very satisfactory heat.

"Will monsieur rise now?"

"No," answered Claude. "Set it there. Bring the water in half an hour from now. He will be ready for you then."

The man bowed and disappeared, while Henri, from the bed, grumbled discontentedly: "How in the name of a thousand devils dost thou know at what hour I will rise? Wilt let me sleep again now, or not?"

"Not, Henri," was the reply, as Claude drew a tabouret up to the bed and spoke in a tone so new that his cousin sat up and looked at him.

"You are in trouble, Claude, and you do not tell me of it."

Claude leaned over the bed, took up the pillows, and fixed them, as a woman might, at the Marquis' back.

"Sit there so, and pull the coverlet about thy shoulders, and then listen to my history, and tell me—what the end will be."

Thereupon the younger de Mailly proceeded to recount, very accurately, with neither exaggeration nor palliation, all that had occurred on the previous night, together with certain incidents which had gone before, unthought of,

but which now stood out from the tangle of life with significant relationship to the present situation. The Marquis listened closely, with increasing anxiety in his expression; and when Claude ceased to speak there was a silence between the cousins. It was this silence that forced upon the Count his first twinge of real dread.

"Well, Henri!" he said at last, with sharp intensity.

"Well, Claude?" returned the other, sadly.

"What dost think of it?"

"I think—do you remember, Claude, the affair of young d'Agenois?"

Claude started. Then he rose, walked measuredly over to the window, and looked out upon the bleak landscape. His face was invisible as he said, in a muffled voice: "François d'Agenois, the Italian, who—who once asked in marriage the hand of the Marquise de la Tournelle? François, Duc d'Agenois—"

"Has lived since then near Geneva, while Mme. de la Tournelle was created Duchesse de Châteauroux. . . . I meant that one, Claude,—yes."

"And you think," said the young fellow, turning about, and squarely facing his companion—"you think that I shall—be invited to undergo the same—fate?"

"Ah, Claude, my cousin—my comrade—surely not! Surely the King is older, his penchant for Marie is now perfectly understood, perfectly secure; nay—"

"Don't say that," interrupted Claude, suddenly. "Why should he be secure with her? Ah, Henri, last night she refused my offer of marriage, it is true; but it may have been to lessen his Majesty's fury against me. Henri, I swear to you, that with her, for her, as my wife, I would live in the desert, a wilderness, anything, and be the happiest man in all the world. She knows this. Henri, she must care—a little!"

Mailly-Nesle listened with a face more serious than ever, and, when Claude finally stopped, he shook his head. "Do not put your faith in her, Claude. I, her brother, warn you. She gave up everything in life to win the

place she obtained. Remember how d'Agenois was her promised husband when he was exiled with her consent. Remember that she drove her own sister, Alexandre's wife, out of Versailles, to the Ursulines, for life. She—no, Claude, she will not help you. She cannot."

The younger sighed. "Ah, well—I ask too much, perhaps. At any rate, it may mean nothing more than a month in the Bastille. That would not be at all difficult. Indeed, I should indulge in a much-needed rest. You and de Coigny should come to tell me all the news; I would invite Monsieur le Gouverneur, and, possibly, my turn-key to dine, and we should all be merry with feasting and fasting by turns. You see, Henri, my spirit will not be shaken till the final blow. This room is like a furnace. When, dear Lord Doleful, are you going to rise?"

"At once, Claude. My friend, your buoyancy is worth rubies. Even now I am mourning for you more than you for yourself. How are you able to move hand or foot?"

"Come, you are aping d'Epernon. You make a bad lover. No woman likes a man with a face so long. Ah! And that reminds me—but what shall you do when you are dressed?"

"Coffee—if 'tis to be had here—and eggs; the health of Mme. de Châteauroux; that of Mme. de Coigny; our sleigh; Versailles; you with me. Now, of what is it that you are reminded?"

"Good. Good. Hurry now, Chaumelle. I famish. . . . I was reminded that, last evening, as I left the last antechamber on the great hall, I beheld your charming Victorine, herself charming—and being charmed."

"Ah!—Mordi! It is that vile abbé—de Bernis, they call him—who was her companion in Paris."

"A handsome fellow," observed the Count, from a mirror where he was adjusting his wig.

The Marquis turned so sharply under Chaumelle's razor that he narrowly missed having his chin laid open. "You think so?" he cried out, anxiously.

Claude burst into a shout of laughter. "On my soul,

Henri, you are a prig. Use a little indifference towards her. 'Tis only that can save you now. Why, positively, you are absurd. How is it that you arrange the 'gallant' now?"

"A trifle smaller than you have it there, and farther down towards the left ear. There. That is better."

"Thanks. Ah, Chaumelle, five livres to you if you have Monsieur le Marquis ready by half-past nine."

Chaumelle more than won his prize, for it was but just half-past when the cousins, having finished their coffee and eggs, were announced at the apartments of the Duchess.

Mme. de Châteauroux, pelisséd, hooded, and muffed in crimson velvet and sables, sat pensively at her window, awaiting the arrival of her sleigh. She rose in unfeigned agitation at the entrance of Claude and her brother.

"Ah, Monsieur le Comte! How rash you are! You compromise me; you—you make your own case infinitely worse. Henri, how could you have permitted him to come?"

"Madame!" cried Claude, beseechingly, but the Marquis interrupted.

"The King, Anne, has left Marly. You—"

"I know. I know. Whom did you see in the hallway as you came here? Any one?"

"De Gêvres and Richelieu," answered Claude.

Henri, frowning, pinched him.

"Good Heaven!" cried the Duchess; "we are lost, both you and I! Oh, you are thoughtless, cruel! Go at once, both of you, and let de Gêvres see you instantly depart for Versailles. I shall not now leave here until twelve o'clock. Go! Go!"

She fairly pushed them from her into her antechamber, pointing, as she did so, to the outer door. Claude had turned scarlet, but Henri was very pale. Both of them bowed in silence; for there seemed no words suitable for bidding the "fair and haughty," now very tearful and eager Châteauroux, good-bye. Once outside, the Marquis turned and looked at Claude.

"De Gêvres was to see us again," he muttered, angrily.

"De Gêvres be—!" was the low reply. "I return to Versailles."

"And I accompany you. . . . Good Heaven, Claude, don't think that she meant it all! You see how everlastingly she must work against all that is generous in her."

"Ah, messieurs! Your morning interview with madame, your sister and cousin, was short. You are leaving the château?"

"We follow the example of his Majesty, monsieur."

"And I, gentlemen, shall follow your first lead. I hasten to pay my compliments to the Duchess. I have the honor to wish you an enjoyable ride."

Richelieu, in a morning toilet of fawn color and lavender, an embroidery bag upon his arm, a patch-box in one hand, smilingly passed the cousins and went on his way to the apartments of the favorite.

Madame was divested of her wraps and resigned to Marly for another two hours. Richelieu seated himself comfortably in the historic boudoir, one foot, prone to repentance for many truffles and overmuch *vin d'Ai*, reposing tenderly on a cushion, his embroidery in his hands, and a snuff-box near by. The favorite, gracious, but a trifle on her guard, placed herself opposite to him and waited.

The Duke took several contemplative stitches before he remarked, gently: "Madame, you look unwell this morning. Now, were I you, I should not be nervous. As I imagine, you were slightly rash yesterday—did not manage quite so perfectly as usual. You have, no doubt, sacrificed the cousin; but you are still secure."

"His Majesty has spoken to you?"

"By no means. But the mad haste with which he departed this morning portends extreme disease of mind. It is his fear that, after all, Claude may hold charms which he does not possess."

The Duchess raised her eyes to the ceiling. "Dear uncle," she said, "Louis is perfect. I adore him!"

"Ah, but you either make him doubt too strongly or you

let him know it too well. You are too impassioned, Anne. I have always told you that. I assure you I should have been married twenty times, instead of only twice, had I not been able to have any woman for the asking."

La Châteauroux, perhaps unconsciously, sighed.

"Ah, madame, life is cruel to us all. But now, Anne, come, confide in me, as your good counsellor, certain particulars which the Court but guesses. What is the last madness of young de Mailly, and why did the King, after a *petit lever* and a vile breakfast, without admitting a single entry, order his sleigh an hour ago and set off for Versailles and de Berryer as if pursued by all the furies? All knowledge is yours, my Anne. Share it with me."

Mme. de Châteauroux rose from her chair and swept two or three times up and down the little room. Richelieu, examining her at his leisure, could discover no trace of agitation in her manner. Suddenly she stopped still and turned towards him.

"I do not deny that Claude is lost," she said, slowly. "But, if he is, is it not his fault alone? He is not ignorant of the ways of the Court. Why should he put himself, his career, in my hands? He will reproach me, without doubt. All will do that. Again I shall be called, as in the other case, without heart, without generosity, without love for my family. *Mon Dieu!*—you remember the scandal when my father left Versailles? Bah! Put me out of my position, uncle. Imagine me as a mere bourgeoisie—of the people. Well, then? What woman but will become selfish, forgetful of all, for the man she loves? What are those others, who stand in her way, to her? And I, Monsieur le Duc, am a woman who loves. I love—I have the courage to love—the King."

A flicker passed through the eyes of the Duke as he bent over his embroidery. Was it amusement, or was it revelation? Could it be but a recollection of certain common Court memories that appertained to the "love" of Marie Anne de Mailly? Was it a fleeting remembrance of the brief and stormy careers of the two older sisters of

this woman, both of whom had held her place, the one dying in it, pitifully enough, the other dismissed by the open command of the Marquise de la Tournelle, then just coming into power? Was it a vision of the angry helplessness of the old Marquis de Nesle, driven away to die in exile, because his pride of family was too great to sanction his daughters' dishonor? Was it a thought for a brother's hidden shame; of the merciless flouting of a helpless queen; of the dismissal of every minister who held at heart the best interests, not of the mistress, but of France; of the ruin of every courtier who had not paid his court to her; of the fate of the hapless d'Aginois; the impending ruin of young de Mailly? Was it, perhaps, a vision of prophecy concerning others to come, on whom disfavor should fall—Belleville, d'Argenson, Chartres, Maurepas, the Dauphin of France—nay, finally, after all, before all, *himself*, the great, the incomparable Richelieu, estranged from the King and the Court through the "love" of this woman? After all, the flutter of many thoughts takes but an instant, and madame had scarcely time for impatience when her good "uncle" was answering her with well-calculated lightness.

"You are right, Anne. And how drunk with the happiness of such love should our most gracious Majesty be! Perhaps he has flown away this morning that he may reflect in happy solitude on his great good-fortune."

Unfortunately, however, as Richelieu well knew, this was not precisely what his most gracious Majesty was engaged in this morning. Upon his unexpected arrival at Versailles at so early an hour, the King's first cry was for de Berryer. The attendant of whom he made demand performed his obeisance, looked nervously about him, and scurried away on a search. In the meantime Louis ascended to the deserted council-chamber off the Ciel-de-Bœuf, threw off coat, hat, and gloves, and pounded on the bell for some one to remove his boots. A valet came, together with the unhappy announcement that M. de Berryer was in Paris—had been there, indeed, since yesterday morning—

on important business. Louis fell into one of his silent rages, despatched a document commanding the instant return of the Chief of Police to his side, growled an order to serve his dinner to him alone where he was, and sank into his official chair at the great table in a fit of sulks which lasted him all day. De Berryer's arrival, at five o'clock in the afternoon, elicited the first gleam of satisfaction from his dull eyes. He ordered a fresh instalment of wine and cakes, closed the doors of the room, and motioned the minister into a chair across the table, where he could stare conveniently into the small, dark face.

"Well, Sire, you have work for me?" inquired the official, with badly concealed irritation. De Berryer had been forced to leave certain matters relative to the farmers-general in a distressingly unfinished state in Paris, had been harassed all through his ride with details of the King's anger, and finally arrived at Versailles tired, nervous, and out of sorts, to be summoned instantly before Louis, who would probably occupy him till seven with his usual tiresome and fussy budget of Court intrigue, gossip, and grievances. And at such times there was certainly one minister of France who cordially hated his position.

"You have work for me?" repeated de Berryer again.

"Yes, yes, yes. I want a *lettre-de-cachet* at once, and you to deliver it," was the reply.

The poor servant groaned inwardly as he drew from his pocket an ever-ready bunch of these conveniences, prepared for filling out. "What name, Sire? It is immediate?"

"Yes. No. Wait. I will tell you about it," responded the King, leaning comfortably back in his chair and munching a *gâteau purlaine*.

De Berryer passed the back of his hand over his forehead and resigned himself. Louis began to speak, recounting in a leisurely but not unentertaining fashion the last developments of the *affaire* de Mailly, as it was called at Court. Presently, despite himself, de Berryer grew interested in the tale. He remembered his last conversation with Claude at the assembly, perceived that the young man

had not taken his advice, but had gone along upon his own career of audacious fidelity to a foolish cause. On the whole, de Berryer rather admired him, and certainly regretted his approaching fall. Besides this, there was that other amusing phase of the matter—that of Louis' furious jealousy of this two-penny Count for whom the favorite doubtless cared not the least in the world, save for the fresh fires of royal devotion that she could kindle at his hands. All things considered, de Berryer had spent duller hours than this in his Majesty's presence.

"And now, my good de Berryer," finished Louis, more comfortably than ever, "you know all. What shall I do? Shall it be the Bastille for a couple of years? *Hein?*"

"No—no, your Majesty," returned the King's companion, calmly.

"What!"

"Listen, Sire, I beg of you, to my reasons. In the first place, la Bastille is no longer what it once was as a place of retirement for rash members of the younger nobility. It is generally crowded to the doors. It is by no means strictly kept. The apartments on the east side fairly reek with a Court atmosphere. All day long there is a continual stream of visitors for the prisoners, who keep quite as much in touch with the times as though they dwelt in the *Œil-de-Boeuf*. I assure you the reputation of a Court gallant is not complete till he has lived a month or two in that old fortress. M. de Mailly's fame would be greatly enhanced during his residence there, and it would be by no means unusual were Mme. de Châteauroux herself to visit him."

The King blasphemed below his breath, and the minister smiled covertly.

"Precisely so, your Majesty. No, it is not bolt, bar, and stone walls to foment his passion that our young Count needs. On the contrary, it is space, time, other courts, other women, new comrades—in fine, a second case of d'Agénais—that will fit the amorous M. de Mailly. He—"

"Bravo, bravo, de Berryer! Excellent, by my faith!"

It is enough. Wait." Louis touched his bell, and a lackey appeared.

"More candles for the table."

Lights were brought and set before the minister, who drew from a drawer in the table some paper, quills, a sand-box, wax, and the small seal.

"Write!" commanded the King.

"And the delivery, Sire, shall take place—when?"

"To-morrow morning, in the chapel, after mass."

De Berryer frowned. "Your Majesty is a second Molière," he observed, politely.

Louis, holding a glass of Burgundy to the light, bowed thanks.

To the delight of the pale puppet-queen, Marie Leczinska, Louis, on Wednesday morning, came to her apartments in the best of humors, to conduct her in person to mass in Mansard's famous chapel. It was an unwritten law in this sanctuary that husbands and wives, not a few of whom had seen each other for the first time at the altar here, but had no cause to love it the more on that account, should sit together. Their Majesties, with Mesdames Henriette and Adelaide, and Monseigneur, the young, Jesuitical Dauphin, set the example by appearing *en famille* in the front space. Behind them sat those of the Queen's ladies who were unmarried or widowed, together with all the *demoiselles d'honneur*, presided over by the unbending Duchesse de Boufflers, who, in spite of herself, could not prevent the glances that passed between this delightful bevy and the company of gallants across the aisle. Mme. de Châteauroux, here always sombrely dressed, excited no comment. Claude de Mailly, alone, out of the whole Court, chose his place with reference to her; and in this place to-day, as usual, he sat, his head on his hand, dreamily listening to the chanting of the choir, and the low intoning, mingling the incense of his earthly but none the less pure adoration with that which ascended from the golden censer to a higher heaven.

Mme. de Châteauroux was pale to-day. More than one person had already noted that fact, and remarked it to a neighbor. If Claude were whiter about the temples and lips than she, none but Henri, beside him, knew it. Never once throughout the service did madame turn to answer the unwavering look that seemed as if it must draw her cold blue eyes by very force about to answer it. But Louis' smooth, satin back was within reach of her hand. She could almost stir his loosely tied locks with her breath. She felt Claude's presence with rare discomfort. The knowledge of his danger was crying to her conscience painfully; but she could not speak, and her eyes must keep their place.

Behind the de Maillys, Marquis and Count, Victorine de Coigny, pale also, great-eyed, and small, sat beside her tall husband, who, though he stared steadily at the altar, failed to make a single response, and no more knew the subject of the address than did his wife, whose thoughts were wandering in far and fair new places.

Mass, to the relief of every one present save, possibly, Marie Leczinska and her son, came presently to an end. In a measured press the many-colored throng passed down the aisle after the sovereigns, bowing, chatting, shrugging, smiling, retailing the last bit of gossip as they might do to-day, happy in the knowledge that twenty-four hours intervened between them and the next chapel. Mme. de Châteauroux, who, to the end, had resolutely avoided her cousin's entreaty, was among the last to set forth for less depressing apartments, surrounded, as usual, by a group of the King's gentlemen. Behind her, aimless, objectless, speaking to few, addressed by many, for a high interest centred around him now, went Claude, with Henri still close beside him. They arrived together at the door, and Mailly-Nesle, a pace ahead, was whispering a compliment into the ear of Mme. de Coigny, when a light hand fell upon Claude's shoulder. The young fellow started under the touch as though thrilled with a sudden presentiment. The Count de Maurepas was beside him.

"Be so good as to come back with me for an instant, monsieur," whispered the minister.

Claude turned and placed himself beside the other. They waited together till the last stragglers had left the chapel. Dim light, and silence that was a relief, fell about them. Up at the far end of the room an acolyte was extinguishing the candles at the altar. Then de Mailly quietly faced his companion.

"What is it that you want?" he asked.

"This, M. de Mailly. Believe me—I regret—exceedingly—my duty. M. de Berryer, however, requested—"

Without further ado Claude took from Maurepas' hand the letter that he held, with its dangling brown seal.

"You choose an odd place for its delivery," he remarked, as he unfolded the paper.

De Maurepas, to whom his good friend, the Chief of Police, had intrusted this unpleasant task, slightly bowed. He was watching the man beside him, the new royal victim, the gentleman who had been his companion in so many places, at so many times, for years. He saw Claude read that short, polite, rather suave missive, which gave small reason for its being, but made the gravity of its threat perfectly apparent in royal language. Claude read it twice, quite through, to the last word, the signature. Then his hand fell heavily to his side, and the paper dropped to the floor. Maurepas stooped to pick it up, but some one else was quicker than he. Henri de Mailly, returning in search of his cousin, had stood for a full minute unnoticed on the threshold. Now, retaining the letter, he turned a questioning gaze towards the pair. Maurepas failed to meet his eyes; but Claude smiled.

"I am starting soon upon a journey, Henri," he remarked. "Monsieur le Comte, may I request that you convey my farewells to his Majesty, since I have not the honor to bid him *au revoir* in person? Permit me to wish you a good-morning."

Claude bowed bravely, but ungracefully enough, and looked towards the Marquis. His lips were dry, his cheeks

suddenly flushed, his eyes very bright. Henri understood the look, and passed with him out of the chapel. De Maurepas was left alone to gaze after them. When they were gone he shifted his position slightly, but made no move to leave the room. Presently de Berryer appeared from the vestibule and joined him.

"I saw them go," he said. "How did he take it?"

Maurepas shook his head. "I am not certain, but I think it was hard for him. I imagine that he was not very sure of what he did. He asked me to say '*au revoir*' to the King. Bah! You might have done this yourself, de Berryer. I don't like such work."

"And do you think, Monsieur le Comte, that I like it better?" queried the King's favorite minister, with a weary frown.

CHAPTER VI

Claude's Farewell



ON the morning of Thursday, January 21st, when a feeble ray of sunlight first straggled into the window of Claude's room on the Avenue de St. Cloud, in the town of Versailles, it fell upon an early company of four men engaged in an unwonted occupation. Upon the canopied bed, half dressed, unwigged, powderless, sat Claude, directing, with some animation, the movements of two men, his own valet and Henri's, one of whom stood before an oaken wardrobe, while the other knelt upon the floor beside a travelling coffer of brown hide, studded with brass nails. At some distance from these three, by a table, was the Marquis, quite dressed, his head leaning on his hand, watching operations in silence. Now and then he turned his eyes to the face of his cousin, while for the rest of the time they wandered about the disordered room. Henri's face was unusually pale to-day, and under his eyes lay shadows of sleeplessness. His mouth was set firmly, and the hand that hung by his side was clenched.

Certainly the room was in a state. All about it, on every chair, on the bureau, the desk, the tabourets, and upon the floor, lay clothes—court-suits, riding-suits, hunting-suits, every-day suits, dressing-gowns, boots, shoes, slippers, long stockings of silk and of thread, laces, ruffles, fine linen shirts, undergarments, wigs, a peruke, two swords, hats, cloaks, gauntlets—every article known to the masculine wardrobe of that day. From the various heaps Claude, by means of a riding-whip which he held, designated what he wished packed. Chaumelle would

pick it out and carry it to Rochard, who folded it and placed it, with melancholy care, in the little coffer.

"I must have one court-suit, but I vow I'll take no more. Which shall it be, Henri—the peach-colored or the white satin? Speak, man!"

The Marquis, with an effort, raised his head. "Both. You will need the white one for your wedding."

Claude stared at his cousin for an instant, and his lips twitched with laughter. Then, with a sudden change of expression, he pulled from his breast, where it had lain all night, the letter that Maurepas had delivered to him. He had not read it since leaving the chapel.

"Owing to certain circumstances which of late have had the misfortune greatly to displease S. M., the King desires to inform Count Claude Vincent Armand Victor de Nesle de Mailly that the absence of the Count from the château and city of Versailles after the noon of Friday, January 22d, in this year of 1744, will be desirable to S. M.; and that after the first day of the month of February, Monsieur the Count, if he has not already crossed the line of the French Kingdom, would of necessity be placed under the escort of one of his Majesty's officers. The King wishes Monsieur the Count a delightful journey, and begs further to add that when monsieur shall desire to present Madame la Comtesse his wife to their Majesties at Versailles, his return to his present abode will be most pleasing to

"LOUIS R."

As Claude for the second time perused this curious letter his face darkened, and, at the last lines, flushed.

"I heard your '*au revoir*' sent to his Majesty," observed Henri, "and, after I read the dismissal, I understood it. You will discover some pretty child in Madrid or Vienna. In six months you will be back again with her for presentation; and here she will quickly find some marquis or duke for cavalier, while you return again with your rashness to the little apartments."

The Marquis spoke these words by no means in raillery, but with such a tone of solemn prophecy that Claude turned a serious and questioning gaze upon his cousin. Then he shook his head.

"Do you, indeed, Henri, think so ill of me as that? Should

I, by such a loveless bargain, dishonor myself and the woman who bore my name? What of the shame to me in bringing such a one, unprotected even by my affection, to this Court of Versailles, of all places on earth; to plunge her into the life that she would find here? You would run me through for a deed like that. Besides, I am going from here to no Court. I leave by post to-morrow for Flanders—Antwerp, or some seaport. And after, unless I travel in the Low Countries and up into Sweden, I have a mind to turn to strange places. Perhaps I shall sail for America.”

“Ah, Claude, it is too far! Where wouldst thou go? To our colony of Louisiana, or the settlements of the South coast—the flower-land that is pestered with Spanish and English pirates? Be sane, my Claude. Remain nearer home. Surely some day you will return to us. Think, think of the homesickness. Without thee here, Claude, I—I—” Henri went no further. His voice had broken, and he suddenly hid his face in his hands and bent over the table.

The Count sprang from the bed, crying roughly to the two servants to continue their work. Then, standing by the chair of Mailly-Nesle, he put both hands affectionately on the two bent shoulders.

“Henri, look at me. Thou shalt not take it in this way. I have got no more than has come to a thousand others. I have loved too well. And since I may not have that one thing for which I would sell the soul from my body, ’tis small matter, after all, where I live, or what my portion is. Some day I shall return hither, doubtless—when—when—or thou shalt come to me. Things may occur, perhaps, that shall make all right. Take courage. Thou art a man! There is no time for this. We must talk together of many things. There is my money, my rents—”

The Marquis raised his head, and Claude nodded with satisfaction to see that he was again in control of himself.

“’Tis better, *hein*? Thou knowest, Henri, I get from Touraine and Languedoc together some fifty thousand livres yearly. I have made that suffice me here, with what

I could win at play. My debts, as Fortune wills, are paid. Can the King say as much? What has paid for this life will stay me better abroad, in whatsoever land I may find myself, than it has done here. How to receive it—"

"That shall be my task, Claude. In May, as you have done, and again later in the year, I will go to both estates, as I visit my own. Your stewards will accept me as master, I imagine. They are good fellows, both."

"Between them they steal, with perfect regularity, seven thousand yearly."

"So little? They are not good, then, but stupid. Mine, on my single estate, costs me ten."

"Your lands nearly double mine."

The Marquis shrugged. "Well—and each three months you will write to me, that I may send the rents where you may be?"

"Yes. I will burden thee with news more often than that. Do you know, my friend, I have a mind to set out from Flanders or England for King George's colonies? It has been said that the summer is a paradise in Virginia, or in Lord Baltimore's province."

"'Tis too far, Claude! Italy or England—well. But America! *Ciel!* I should be as content with you in the moon."

"It is no more than a month's voyage in fair weather, I have heard."

"Ay, and six in foul."

"Ah, well—we'll not speak of it now. I—"

"And the language! Recollect your love of the English tongue."

"I do not love French to-day. I swear to you that I will perish at once rather than go to swell the peopling of our Christian Majesty's damnable colonies!"

"Chut! That is treason. Finish your selection of garments there, and let us go out to seek a dinner. I perish of hunger."

"I come, I come. You must not die to-day. Is the suit of olive there, Rochard? Then—"

His next word was interrupted by a tapping at the door.

"Umph! Some gossip to visit you!" growled the Marquis.

Claude drew his dressing-gown about him and motioned his man to the door. "Open—but not too widely," he said.

Rochard unclosed the door, pushed it open six inches, and peered out. After a low-voiced colloquy with some one outside, he turned into the room again, holding out to his master a note addressed in a handwriting which Claude dreamed of. As he opened and read it, the boy turned very white. Henri, who was watching him closely, hurried to his side.

"What is it?"

"Nothing," was the quick reply. "Rochard, it—it is the valet, is it not?"

"Fouchelet, yes, Monsieur le Comte."

"Tell him that—I will come."

Rochard bowed and went to deliver the message.

"Claude—Anne—Anne has interceded for you? No. She dare not do that. She is mad enough to see you again?"

"To say good-bye," was the reply, formed with dry lips. Then suddenly he cried out, sharply: "Henri, I cannot go! I will not leave her to that man! Either I stay here to die, or she shall come with me as my wife. Henri, I tell you I cannot leave her!"

It was two o'clock in the afternoon, and the Duchess was alone in her dressing-room. She was alone, had been alone through the whole morning, refusing admittance to the usual visitors of the toilette, in the hope that Claude might come. She had learned, like the rest of the Court, of the letter delivered in the chapel. But the reason of it, which was so well known to her, the Court but guessed. Her desire to speak with her cousin again was unaccountably strong, and she could not believe that he would make no effort to see her—for the last time. Nevertheless the hours had passed, and Claude neither

sent her any word of farewell nor came himself. She was anxious, and she was bored. The King, who had that morning been informed that she was ill, had gone hunting. Versailles was deserted. Even Victorine was at Rambouillet. And so madame, more restless with every passing instant, was at last guilty of the imprudence of sending for the man whose banishment was caused by his having dared to enter too closely into her life.

Her note finally despatched by the only man in her household whom she could trust, she drank a second cup of chocolate and ate a fillet of venison, of royal shooting, with some appetite. Afterwards, with the assistance of Antoinette, she made one of her most careful *négligé* toilets, in which the carelessness was obviously becoming. Her dress was entirely of white. She wore not a single jewel, wiped off every trace of rouge, took the ornaments from her hair, and brushed its powdery locks till the bright gold lay in natural waves about her neck, and Mme. de Châteauroux had become as beautiful as flattery itself could have painted her. She was, at this time, nearly seven and twenty years of age. Her face was still young, but her manner was old—older than that of the King. She had acquired long ago the carriage of a King's consort, and that was, indeed, a rôle which she had played so much that it had become a natural part of herself. She had faced difficult situations since her childhood; and never, save once with her dead father and once with her husband, the old Marquis de la Tournelle, had she lost control of herself and of the affair in hand. It had made her too self-confident in appearance—a fact which she realized, but could not change. She would have liked to-day to play a younger part with Claude, but she sighed and shook her head as Antoinette finally tied back the shining hair with a white ribbon, and the grand manner descended upon her like a pall.

It was now a full half-hour since she had sat in the little room, waiting, and looking out upon the bleak courtyard below her window. She had ceased to think, and

her appearance was that of a statue in marble, when Antoinette softly pushed open the door of her room and allowed a cloaked and hatted figure to pass in. The door closed again after the entrance, and at the same time there was a little click from the antechamber beyond, as the faithful maid locked the door that opened upon the great corridor. In the boudoir of the favorite two people were alone.

With a slight movement of the shoulders Claude dropped his enveloping mantle upon a chair behind him, and threw his hat down upon it also. Then, impulsively, he turned towards his cousin, as though upon the spot he would have taken her in his arms and told her all that he had come to say. But there was something in her attitude that stopped him—something that even forced him back a pace from his advance. As a matter of fact the Duchess meant to be herself mistress of the scene, and, having no idea of Claude's ill advised intent, she seated herself quietly on a chair with her back to the drawn window-curtain, and, with a gesture peculiar to herself, bade him draw a tabouret to her knee. He went to her obediently, looking at her with repressed expectation in his white face. After an instant's hesitation she said, slowly:

"And so, my poor Claude, it is come to the end."

His reply was quick. "No, Anne. It is not the end yet."

"What! What are you saying? You are exiled, Claude."

"Ah, yes. The King told you that."

"It was not the King told me that. Do you mean that the story of the letter of banishment is not true?"

Claude was silent.

"Why do you say it is not the end?"

"Because, Anne, I mean that for me it shall be the beginning."

"Of what?"

"Of freedom—of life—of love."

"Love!"

"Yes."

The Duchess was puzzled. She drew slightly away from him. "Then there is some one—some one of whom I know nothing."

"Yes, Anne, some one of whom you know nothing. Would you hear who it is? No, remain where you are! That some one whom I love, whom I have come to to-day, with whom now I am going to plead for life, is your real self. You have forgotten it in life here, my Anne. You have forgotten, in the midst of your estate, in the midst of the Court ways, what you were before all that was part of you. Listen. We played together, you and I, and Alexandre and Henri, and Louise and Pauline, in the gardens of the old château, by the river-bank, and through the forest. We were the youngest, you and I. Alexandre was our leader, and we obeyed him as our general. I liked you then better than the other girls, though you always mocked at me for a baby, while Louise was gentle, and Pauline always in difficulty. And after—we separated, all of us. You were sent to the Ursulines, I to Languedoc with a tutor, Alexandre to Paris. It was there in the old Hôtel de Mailly, at Alexandre's wedding with Louise, that again we came together. Ah, Anne, Anne, I think you have not forgotten what followed! The first scandal, Alexandre's death, Louise's life in the little apartments, how the King grew weary, how little Pauline was brought from her convent, how she, too, was sacrificed to infamy, and how she died—how she was murdered, Anne, you—"

"Stop, Claude!"

"Not yet. Pauline was murdered, I say—poisoned, in her sickness. And then, Anne, then the way was opened for you by Mme. de Mazarin's death. How should the rest of us have guessed—your father, I, Henri, already unhappy with Mme. de Mailly-Nesle—how should we have guessed that you, too, should have followed in the footsteps of your sisters? *Mon Dieu*, Anne! In your widow-

hood, after Maurepas took the Hôtel Mazarin, Henri's house was open to you. Why did you choose instead to put yourself under the protection, not of the Queen, not of Louise, but of his Majesty? And then—the end was so swift. You drove Louise pitilessly away—you ruined d'Agenois with your coquetries—you infatuated the King with your daring and your loftiness; your title was bestowed; you reigned; and then comes the last: my history with you. I know your life, Anne, from its beginning to to-day. You know what my feeling has always been. And now, when I am so nearly at the end of hope, you would have me make no resistance to fate; you would have me acquiesce; you would have me bid you good-bye with de Gêvres' manner, and depart, quietly. I have right to more than that."

"All this is well enough if you wish it, little one. Neither do those long 'recollections' of thine disturb me, save that they are very stupid, my Claude. But now, how shall you continue? Are there yet more of them?" Evidently the Duchess was not overpleased with the interview, so far.

"I have done with the recollections, but I have more to say," returned the boy, undaunted by her manner. "I have something to say which, once before, you have heard, but which you shall listen to again. It is why I obeyed your note. In other case I should have left Versailles without seeing you. It is something that I am going to offer you, something that I have to give that is not elsewhere, I think, to be found in Versailles. You will seek long, Anne, before you find it again. It is something that you, and every woman about you, make light of daily; and yet it is what women—ay, and men—sell their souls for."

"Love," murmured Madame la Duchesse, absently.

"Yes, it is love—my love, that I have to give. Anne, to you, here, being as you are; what you are; belonging to none who has the right to guard you; paid with much gold, it is true, yet with false gold; puppet-queen, without



“I GIVE YOU ONLY THIS”

real honor in any heart, your name a byword in many countries—”

“Ah! Ah! You insult—”

“*I speak truth!* You know that. To you, I say, who have so little of love, none of real honor, I offer all. I offer you marriage, a name unstained, a pure-hearted devotion, a life that shall be pure— Ah, now, Anne, now, I am making you feel! There. Do not turn from me. No, no. Listen! I did not mean it. Forget what I have said—forgive it. Think only of how I have suffered. Think how utterly I love you; how I am a man desperate. My whole existence, my heart, my mind, my hopes, are here at your feet. Crush them—you kill me. You cannot spurn all. To leave you is to enter a living death. But—but—you must know what love means! It means that my soul belongs to you; that in you, for you, only, forever, I live. How, then, can you let me go from you? You will be tearing the heart from my body. You know that all my life—it has been you. Had I ever cared for another, it would not have mattered so. Anne—” he was upon his knee—“Anne—you shall come with me! You shall come away with me—into the sweetest exile that ever man was blessed with. Why, look you, I take you from a palace, but I will give you that which I shall transform to paradise! Oh, my dear—my dear—I can say no more. Anne, Anne, I die for you!”

Both her hands were in his, clasped so tightly that she was pained. Much of the force of his passion had entered into her. It could not but do so, for it was too real. She was trembling; her breath came unsteadily, and she could not give her answer with his upturned eyes upon her. Gently, very gently, she pushed him aside, rose from her chair, and, turning away from him, began to pace the end of the room, steadying herself as she walked. De Mailly, a little dazed now, the reaction from his nervous strain already beginning to overcome him, passed slowly to the opposite side of the dressing-room and stood there with his back to the door, one cold hand pressed to his

damp forehead. His face was deathly white. His body quivered. Presently madame stopped, in her walk, before her cabinet of toys, opened one little drawer, and took something therefrom. Then she went over to where her cousin was standing, and, with an effort, spoke:

"Thank you," she said, dreamily, "for what you have said to me. May God, in his goodness, bless you, little cousin. You know that it is all useless, what you wish. Some day you will be glad that my place was here—that I knew that I was not fit for you. Remember it. I am not fit for you. You spoke truth at first. See, I grant you all that. You must go your way alone. Such as I could not make you happy. I—give you only this—if you care to take it—for memory. 'Tis all I have. As to my love—who knows what I love—or where? Adieu."

She held something out to him, something white, and heavy with gold and little jewels. It was the mate to that gauntlet which he had won from her and given to the King ten days ago. He took it, mechanically, and placed it, almost without looking at it, in a pocket. Then he picked up his cloak and his hat. Slowly he put both on; and, once more, all accoutred, he turned to look at her. Her back was towards him. Her head was bent. He could not speak coherently. He put out his hand and felt for the fastening of the door. There was a long, inaudible sigh. The door swung open. An effort, two steps, a slight mist before his eyes—he was gone. In the antechamber Henri, with haggard face and tears unconcealed, waited also for a clasp of the hand, to bid him godspeed to his banishment.

Book 11

DEBORAH

CHAPTER I

A Ship Comes In



ALL night the waters of the Chesapeake and those of the Atlantic beyond had been tumbling under the force of a fresh east wind that was bearing an incoming vessel straight up to her harbor and home. But with the first streak of gray along the far horizon, Night ceased to flap her dusky wings, and the wind fainted till it was but a breath. As the wavelets lapped against the ship's side, her captain, longing for home, shrugged his big shoulders and ordered out more canvas.

It was a fair dawn. The whole stretch of sky over the bay was flushed with pink and beamy with gold; while beyond this the clear greenish turquoise of mid-sky and the west grew so vivid that the last clinging night-mist melted away, and the day waited only for the sun. He came at last, a great, fiery wheel, dripping from a watery bath and pouring his splendor back to the waters again till the river ran gold, dazzling the eyes of the gulls that veered across its breast down to the bay and out towards the salty sea. And the sun woke the forests of birches and poplars and spruce, colored the dandelions in the grass all over again, drank dew from the flower-cups, played with the breeze among the peach-blossoms of the orchard on the bank, and finally entered into the quaint breakfast-room of a colonial house, Trevor Manor, that stood on the river Severn, three miles from the city of Annapolis.

Adam, the house-butler, very black and very sleepy, was in this small apartment, dusting. From the next

room Lilith, his wife, hummed, in a rich contralto, over her sweeping. Otherwise the house was still; for the sun rises early in May.

The breakfast-room wherein Adam worked, or played at work, is worthy of description, perhaps; for the colonial country-side knew nothing just like it. It was the south-west corner room on the lower floor, opening out of the library, but so easily accessible from the kitchen, which was fifty feet from the house, that the family commonly used it for all their meals. The general Southern fashion of dining in the central hall, from a custom of hospitality, had its drawbacks. On the north side of the breakfast-room were the library door, a small buffet covered with the best cheynay, some chased silver, and a little Venetian glass-ware, the pride of the family heart, and, on the other side of the doorway, a badly done family portrait. In the east wall was a large fireplace, with a mantel above, on which stood two large porcelain jars and a black bust of Plato, over which hung a recent print of his Majesty King George. To the south a large window looked out upon the yard behind; but the western wall of this little place was no wall at all. Across the top of it, just below the ceiling, a grudging support to the upper story was given by a heavy oaken beam. Beneath this all was glass. The little, opal-like, diamond-shaped panes, were wont to catch the rays of the afternoon sun, and make the room, from noon to twilight, a blinding, rainbow cloud of light. A door, too, there was here, all of glass and bound with lead—a real triumph of craftsman's skill in those simple days. It had been Madame Trevor's idea, however,—and where was the workman in Maryland who would not have been stimulated to inspiration with Madame Trevor to oversee his work? The door opened upon a terrace which led by a little flight of steps down into the rose-garden, or, by a diverging path, off to the big round kitchen, in which last building the morning fires had been lit, and Chloe, with Phyllis, her scullion, daughter, and probable successor, was plucking spring chickens for the morning meal.

Adam and Lilith, their first tasks ended, were now setting the table in the breakfast-room, with table-cloth of unbleached linen, the ordinary service of burnished pewter, silver knives, and carving-set of steel, horn-handled. When the six places at the oval table had been laid, Lilith disappeared through the glass door, to return presently with a great platter of newly picked strawberries, green-stemmed, scarlet and fragrant, and still glistening with dew. These were set in the centre of the table, while on either side stood an earthenware bowl heaped with sugar, patiently scraped by Adam from the high, hard loaves that came, wrapped in bright purple "dye-paper," up from the Spanish Indies.

The sun being by this time nearly two hours high in the heavens, the breakfast-room was deserted by serving-folk to regain a more tranquil tone for the reception of its ordinary habitants. Through the open door came the breath of the May morning, heavy with the sweetness of the garden just outside. Plato gazed mildly down upon the two or three lazy flies that hummed over the strawberries, and once a robin from the woods near by skimmed into the room, brushed past the decanters on the buffet, halted for a second on a jar near King George, and made a darting exit through the open southern window.

Finally, into the waiting solitude, came Sir Charles—Sir Charles, tall, slender, graceful, freshly wigged and powdered, his lieutenant's uniform of scarlet and white in harmony with the morning, the *Gentleman's Magazine* in one of his well-kept hands, an eye-glass on a silken cord in the other. He seated himself in an evidently accustomed place at the table, pushed back his chair a little, comfortably crossed his legs, and began to reperuse an article on the best methods of preserving fox-brushes, which had engaged his attention the evening before. He was not a rapid reader, and he had not half finished the column when he felt, unmistakably, another presence near him. Thereupon he permitted himself an unmannerly luxury:

"Good-morning, Debby," he murmured, without looking up.

"Good-morning, Sir Charles," was the reply.

Then, quickly throwing aside his paper, the young man rose, bowed as he should have done, and stood looking at her who was before him.

Deborah stood in the glass doorway, half in and half out of the room. Her face was slightly flushed, and her hair, as usual, in a state of delightful, crinkly disorder. Otherwise her appearance was immaculate, and, for all Sir Charles could have told, she might have been in a costume of brocade and lace. It was no more, however, than a faded blue and white homemade linen over a petticoat of brown holland, with a small white muslin kerchief crossed upon her breast. She was bareheaded, and the hair that had been tossed into a thousand rebellious ringlets was tied back with a blue ribbon. Deborah Travis, Sir Charles Fairfield's second cousin, and Madame Trevor's first, was, at this time, seventeen years old, and not yet so pretty as she gave promise of being—later. Nevertheless, Sir Charles' poorly concealed devotion in her direction was a matter that was not discussed in the Trevor family. The tongues of slaves, however, are seldom bridled among themselves; and neat things upon this interesting topic were not infrequently spoken round cabin-fires on cool evenings in the quarters.

"You've quite recovered, I trust, Deborah, from your—your indisposition of yesterday?"

The girl's cheeks grew pink as she answered, quietly, "Quite, thank you, Sir Charles."

"'Twas another experiment in the still-room?" he ventured.

"Of course," she responded, reluctantly, and in a tone that finished the topic.

There was a pause. The Governor's lieutenant was finding himself again. "Will not you come in, Mistress Debby?" he said, finally. "Or may I come out and walk in the garden a little with you?"



“THE YOUNG MAN ROSE AND BOWED”

"Thank you, I shall come in. Breakfast is ready, but the rest are late."

"And you have been in the still-room all this while?"

"No, I have been in the twelve-acre field, and as far as Hudson's Swamp."

"Devil take me! What were you doing there?"

"I was hunting for a plant—but I could not get it. I brought home some young tobacco instead."

"Why—why—Deborah, 'tis always plants with you! Can you find nothing nearer home to suit your pleasure? Tell me the plant you sought, and I will hunt for it to the other end o' Maryland, if you command."

"Thank you, Sir Charles, but in a month I shall pluck it for myself, at the end of the huckleberry path. 'Tis spotted hemlock. I found one, young yet, but well-looking, which I shall gather as soon as 'tis big enough."

"Spotted hemlock! Child, 'tis rank poison! I'd a horse die of it once in—"

He broke off suddenly and turned about as Madam Trevor, with her younger daughter, Lucy, rustled into the room. The elder lady looked rather sharply from her nephew to her young cousin as she came in; but she could read neither face. Sir Charles bowed with great respect, and Deborah gave her usual demure courtesy for the morning. Lucy was a slight, pretty little creature, with thin, silky dark hair, lively blue eyes, and a waist as trim as Deborah's own. She greeted the two cousins with equal grace, but seemed to prefer Deborah's company, drawing her a little on one side to show a spindle-prick upon her finger. Their whispered conversation was interrupted by the entrance of the master of the house, Madam Trevor's only son, Vincent. He was a well-built, muscular fellow, a trifle short for his breadth of shoulder, with the family's blue eyes, and hair so black that the powder but badly concealed its hue. He greeted his mother with profound respect, lightly kissed his little sister's cheek, and nodded to Deborah in a preoccupied fashion. Then, joining Charles at the buffet, he proceeded to mix their first potation

of the day, two Venice glasses full of Jamaica rum, sugar, and water. Both gentlemen drank to the health of Madam Trevor, who acknowledged the usual courtesy with a slight nod, and then, seating herself at the head of the table, drew towards her the platter of strawberries.

"We are not to wait for Virginia?" asked Vincent, taking his place.

Madam was about to reply when, from the little passageway beyond the library, came the crisp rustle of stiff petticoats, and Virginia Trevor, the belle of Annapolis, tall, fresh of complexion, unrouged, of slender figure, and delicate patrician features, came smilingly into the room. The gentlemen hastened to rise, and Sir Charles lifted back her chair.

"Thank you. Your pardon, madam, for being late. Amanda was very slow."

"After your wakefulness of last night, I had not imagined that you would attempt to rise this morning," answered her mother.

Virginia glanced at Lucy, and a half smile passed between them. It was over before Madam Trevor perceived it.

"Debby was the sick one yesterday," observed Lucy, gently. "But you seem to be quite recovered to-day," she finished, turning to her cousin, just as Adam entered from the kitchen, bearing with him a platter of fried chickens, crisply browned and smoking, while Lilith followed with hoe-cake and bacon.

"Deborah's illness appears to be a matter of her own choice," remarked Madam Trevor, with displeasure in her tone. "She has been warned of the dangers of her strange and useless experiments. If she chooses to go her way against all advice, she must accept the consequences of such folly."

Deborah was silent, and appeared unconcerned at the reproof. Virginia, however, rather unwisely, spoke in her favor. "Indeed, Debby's experiments would seem to me most useful, mother. You yourself say that no one about Annapolis can make such rose and lavender water, or distil

such cordials and strong waters as she. The still-room, too, is a different place since she was given charge over it."

"I was not of the opinion, Virginia, that Deborah's illness resulted either from rose-water or from cordial. And, as to the still-room, who enters it to know how it may be kept?"

"Madam Trevor, I have never refused entrance to any one of the family or the slaves who has wished to enter the room you gave me charge over! Indeed, Lucy—"

"That is enough, Deborah."

Sir Charles Fairfield, though to all appearances he had not been listening to the short conversation, flushed a little at the manner in which it was ended, and, raising his voice, he addressed Vincent:

"Will you ride into town with me to-day? I've not waited on his Excellency for a week. On my life! they give us an easy time out here! Fancy a full-pay staff-officer at home, in camp, not seeing his colonel for a week! I must really ride in to-day. Come with me, Vincent, and see what idea there is of a chase next week."

Vincent poured out another tankard of quince-cider and slowly shook his head: "'Tis not possible to-day, Charles. They are just beginning to top the tobacco. I am going over all the farther fields with Thompson—and there are three new blacks to be graded. If you'll go to-morrow, I'll ride with you; but not to-day."

"Pa'don, Mas' Trev'l!" cried a black boy, in house livery, who came running in from the front. "Docta' Caw'l and Mist' Cawlve't outside on the' ho'ses, an' say, can they come in?"

"Mr. Calvert!" cried Lucy.

"Go to meet them and bring them here at once, Vincent," commanded Madam Trevor, at the same time sounding a hand-bell for Adam and Lilit.

Vincent and Charles together hurried out of the room, while the ladies drew more closely together at the table, and two extra places were laid.

"Bring some fresh chicken and hot bacon and hoe-cake

at once, Adam; and have Chloe fry some oysters and tap a barrel of apple-jack."

The slaves scurried away to the kitchen again as the sound of deep masculine voices was heard in the library. The guests entered the breakfast-room side by side, and the four ladies rose to greet them; Madam Trevor first, with her daughters just behind her, and Deborah, with suddenly eager eyes, a little to one side.

Dr. Charles Carroll, father of "Mr. Carroll, of Carrollton," foremost Whig and Catholic in Annapolis, always in disfavor with the Governor officially, and excellent friends with him of a Saturday night, forty-five years old, wealthy, bluff, a little gray under his bag-wig, booted, spurred, fresh of color, and bright of eye, greeted his old friend and mentor, Madam Trevor, with hearty good-humor. Beside him was Benedict Calvert, a son of the Lord Proprietary, but Protestant bred; Whig by preference, slender, handsome, unusually dignified, and quite unaffected. After the various salutations the entire party reseated themselves at table, and the guests, hungry after their early canter, helped themselves without stint to the freshly cooked food brought in for them. The doctor had placed himself, as usual, by Deborah, who was all attention now; while Mr. Calvert, with a sympathetic smile of understanding and good-comradeship, was by Lucy, with his hostess on the other side.

"And now, madam, young ladies, Sir Charles, and our host," cried the doctor, in a hearty voice, "we are about to repay your hospitality with news, excellent news, for every one of you!"

"Ah! Let us hear it, doctor!" cried Vincent, while the others murmured assent.

"Well, then, for the ladies first! The *Baltimore* is in port, after a bad voyage. She sailed from Portsmouth on the 20th of February. I was on the south piers as she came to anchor. Her cargo—or part of it—is all for feminine ears to hear. She has with her the last fashions from home, and the material to reproduce them. There

are paduasoy and lutestrings, and satins and laces, and damasks and silverware, and cheynay and glass, and ribbons and combs, and shoe-buckles and silk stockings, and most wonderful garters, I'm told; and—"

"Nay, now, doctor, 'tis far enough!" cried Sir Charles; and the gentlemen laughed.

"Well, then, there are those things, and more. And on the morrow, at ten of the morning, there is to be a public sale on the docks off Hanover Street, where he who has the wherewithal may buy. And I am bidden to ask you all to ride in and spend what moneys you can wrest from Vincent's hands, and, after, to come to my house, where Mistresses Letitia and Frances will serve you with a fair widower's dinner. How now—what think you of my first news, damsels?"

"'Tis what none in the world but you could bring, Dr. Carroll," replied Madam Trevor, beaming graciously.

"And we may go, mother?" asked Lucy, voicing the anxiety of her more dignified sister and her silent cousin.

"Yes, we will go—and our compliments and thanks to Mistress Letitia and Mistress Frances for their asking. Deborah, child, you must have tabby for a new petticoat; and I shall get you all muslins."

"And I must have a new set of plumes for—"

"Mother, may I not have a flowered paduasoy this year?"

"Come, come, girls! 'Tis our turn now! Surely, doctor, you do not imagine us interested in sales of silk stockings and satins? What is the news for us?" asked Vincent, with a slight smile.

Benedict Calvert laughed. "Troth, sir, 'tis not every man that is so unfeignedly disdainful of silk stockings and satins, whether for his own attire or for a lady's. Howbeit, there is other news that you may like to hear. In the assembly yesterday the matter of the commissioners for Lancaster was finally settled. Word has come from Virginia that the council will open on the 25th of June. Our men will probably leave here on the 20th; and—"

"I am elected to go, devil take me!" cried Sir Charles, ruefully.

"No such luck. Do not bemoan thyself, Charlie. Not one of the Governor's staff, and only one official—Marshe—is of the number," returned Benedict, grinning broadly. "'Twas a prudent choice. Not a Radical on either side."

"Then the doctor's scarce in," observed Vincent.

"That am I not," returned the doctor with eminent good-humor. "But Mr. Calvert—the worshipful Mr. Calvert—is; and so are Phil Thomas, and the Reverend Mr. Cradock, and Edmund Jennings, and Colvill, and—ah, yes! Bob King. There, at least, is one Radical for you. Well, well! Even such as they should manage, together with their right honorable compeers from Virginia and Pennsylvania, to buy the right of our colonial lands from the Six Nations—after a hundred and fifty years of occupancy willy-nilly!"

"Quite so. And now that's all our news, Madam Trevor. Does it equal the breakfast?"

"Not quite all, seeking your pardon! But the other matter is for the ears of Mistress Debby here, whom, if you will permit me, madam, I will, after breakfast, attend to her sanctum—the still-room."

Deborah did not move. Her eyes dropped, and sharp-eyed Calvert himself could not have guessed the eagerness hidden under her perfect mien.

"Deborah has been too much with her drugs of late, Dr. Carroll. I think it were better if you talked with her on some healthier subject. I am not over-fond of her ill-considered ways. They are morbid, much of the time."

"Ah, madam, I am sorry for that! I look forward to the consultations with little Mistress Deborah as the happiest reminiscences of my professional days—before I abandoned physic for merchandise. Your young cousin has remarkable talent about it."

Madam Trevor shrugged her shoulders. "If you put it in that way, Dr. Carroll, how can I refuse you your pleasure in coming to our plantation? If 'tis a question

of talking with Deborah or not coming at all, why—Deborah is all at your service.”

“By my troth, Madam Antoinette, if that is a pleasantry, it is not one that I like overmuch. How could you so take my words?”

“Come now, doctor, hurry on! Conduct the damsel to your physicking-room, and I’ll wait here. You forget that our road leads on to the Kings’.”

“To be sure. Well, Debby, let us be off. I must see your manipulation of the new retort.”

Thereupon the doctor and his protégée, leaving the others still at table, went together out of the glass door, down the path, across the yard, with its great poplar-trees and the groups of pickaninnies playing, as usual, about the high well-sweep, to a small building a trifle northeast of the cabins and half hidden in great lilac bushes that clustered before its very door. This was Deborah’s sanctum, the still-room; and into it she and her companion retired.

The single room contained three large windows, through one of which nodded a thick bunch of purple lilacs, heavy with perfume, and still damp with dew. Along the windowless wall of the room ran a stout pine table, on which, among various utensils, stood two chemist’s retorts, one the old iron alembic, the other Deborah’s greatest treasure, a glass retort for which Dr. Carroll had sent to Europe. In one corner stood the charcoal box, a tall, iron brazier containing some smouldering coals, and a keg for water.

While Deborah built up her charcoal fire and carried the brazier to the table, Carroll went over to a corner cupboard, opened its door, and looked in upon the five shelves where, ranged in orderly rows, stood all the phials and flasks that Deborah had been able to collect. Only a dozen or so contained more or less muddy-looking liquids, and on each of these was pasted a paper label covered with fine writing. One after another the doctor picked them up and examined them.

“Aha!” he exclaimed, finally, taking the cork from one,

and smelling the cloudy mixture within. "Aha! You have it here! I thought so. Now, this is precisely the thing that I should advise."

Deborah went over to him. "What! The monks-hood? 'Tis a poor solution. For want of pure alcohol, I had to use rum."

"No matter. Let us manipulate this a bit, Debby, instead of your tobacco there. For this is necessary. And while we are distilling some pure *aconitum napellus*, I will tell you a little story, and weave for you a prettier romance than ever you did find in *The Chyrurgien's Mate* or old Galen's *Art of Physick*, that once I found you with—or even the *Whole Duty of Man*, which I swear you have not read."

"Yes, I have. But the story, Dr. Carroll! Was't the news you had for my ears?"

"Even so, mistress. Now—careful with the body. We mustn't spill this—where's your filter? That's it. A slow evaporation will be best. Can you fix the other end? Good! You have a deft hand."

"Well, now, the tale runs this wise. You heard me say that I was at the piers when the *Baltimore* came in this morning. I'm half-owner in her, and, besides that, Croft is a very good friend of mine, and 'tis four months since he sailed from here. He—the captain, Debby—came off from the ship in his boat, looking a bit tired and haggard, and more glad to get home again than ever I saw him before. They'd a nasty voyage, been short of water for a week, and, besides that, he had a tale to tell about one of his passengers. At Portsmouth only four came on board, one of them a young fellow, a Frenchman, known to Lord Baltimore, who commended him to the care of Croft. It appears that the young man is of the nobility and high up in Court society at his home—Paris, I suppose. But, for some reason unknown, he packed himself on board the *Baltimore* and sailed for a place certainly far enough away from his friends and his people, whoever they are. Croft says that it can't be an unlawful

thing he's done to make him come away, for the Lord Proprietary himself came down to the ship with him and tried to persuade him to give up the idea of coming. I suggested to Croft that, if it were not outlawry, love were the thing to send a man flying like a fool from civilization; and Croft vows I hit it. This noble Marquis de something-or-other, Croft said, mooned about the ship like a soul in purgatory for the first weeks out, and thereupon he fell sick in good earnest. It seems he's been in a raving fever now for days past, sometimes delirious, sometimes in coma. He's talked overmuch, from what I can hear, about Lewis, the French King, and a lot of madames, and a Henry—his rival, perhaps—and I don't know what all.—See, there's the first vapor. Now 'twill be just right.—Well, Croft said he must see this man safe off his hands and in some place where he could be cared for, before he'd make report of the voyage. So, Debby, I sent a black up to the ordinary of Mrs. Miriam Vawse, and she came down herself to the wharf, just as they got the man ashore—de Mailly, his name is. By the great Plutarch, Deb, he's the man for us! Never have I seen a creature in such condition! I think he must have been well enough looking once. But now!—He's a skeleton from fever. His face is shrunk and as bright as a hunting-coat. His hair—'tis long and black—tangled into a mat; and his clothes, of excellent make they are, hang about him like bags. He was conscious when he landed, but I didn't hear him speak a single time as we drove him up the hill and to the ordinary, where Mrs. Miriam is to care for him.

“Now, Deborah, here's my part of the tale for you. To-morrow, when you come in town for the sale, after you dine with us at noon, I shall manage so that you go down to the Vawse house and yourself see this fellow, judge his symptoms, and administer this very stuff—that is coming out fine and clear now—to him, in your own way. 'Twill be the best practice you could have; you could scarce make the man worse; and 'twould be a grand thing, eh, Deb, to accomplish such a cure as that?—My

faith, you'll be having me return to the profession in a year more! But hang me if I'd not be found a better practitioner—with your assistance—than Richards, dispenser of poisons that he is!"

"And so are we, Dr. Carroll," returned Deborah, soberly, as she carefully watched the process of evaporation in the retort. "Indeed, I think that I like better knowing the things that will kill than those that will cure."

"Bloodthirsty maiden—don't you know 'tis all the same thing?—And how d'you like my plan?"

"I think, sir, that madam never would permit it. 'Twould be a most highly improper thing."

"Nonsense—nonsense. If you were my own maid, you should certainly do it. I'll manage. Trust me—that is, if you care for it. Are you indifferent?"

Deborah was silent for a long moment. Then she sighed. "I'm not indifferent. And—and I'd dearly like to see a gentleman from Court—even though it were only from the French Court."

"*Only* the French Court! Why, child, 'tis the greatest in the world—for courtiers and gayety. What more would you have?"

Deborah had no time to make answer, for at that moment one of the house-slaves came to the open door of the still-room.

"Beg pa'don, Mist' Cawlve't sen't' say the ho'ses a'e ready, an' does doctah want dinne' at Mist' King's, o' is he goin' eat Miss Deb's dis—dis—somethin', I done fo'got what."

Carroll laughed. "Troth, Debby, Mistress Lucy must have been less entertaining than usual this morning. I must go, I suppose.—Can you finish this alone? You seem to know all the processes."

"Yes, I can finish it in an hour, if madam lets me stay here."

"I'll try to see that she does. Will you bring the *aconitum* to-morrow, then?"

"Yes." Deborah smiled and courtesied.

The doctor bent over and kissed her hand with affectionate gallantry. "Good-morning, Hygeia."

"Good-bye, sir."

"Till to-morrow. At the French Court, I believe, they say '*au revoir*,'" he added, mischievously, while the girl smiled. Then Carroll strode off, with David at his heels, leaving Deborah alone at her favorite occupation, wondering a little, in an absent-minded way, over the unusual event that her somewhat eccentric mentor proposed to bring into her life.

Mr. Benedict Calvert, with the Trevor family clustered about him, stood, riding-whip in hand, in the portico of the manor, in front of which, on the driveway which curved out towards the river, were the two horses, Carroll's and his, held by one of the stable-boys. Mr. Calvert was laughing and talking blandly with Lucy and Sir Charles; but madam, with her elder daughter and Vincent, stood a little to one side, and annoyance was very plainly readable in the face of the mistress of the house. The doctor, with a cheery smile, came briskly round the corner of the east wing. It took but one glance to tell him who had really called him from the still-room.

"Most puissant Lord Commissioner, behold me here at your command!" he cried, approaching his companion.

"A—Deborah is not with you?" observed Madam Antoinette rather uselessly.

"No. Shall I call her? I left her in the preparation of a little matter which I had requested of her. Pardon me. I did not know that I was taking her from—" he made as if to go after her, when Vincent interposed.

"Don't trouble, doctor. She will be only too glad to finish what you asked. Afterwards there will be time enough for the spinning, or the weaving, or whatever is necessary."

Carroll thanked the young man with a little glance, and began at once making his farewells. He perceived that the time for introducing the project of Deborah's visit on the morrow was eminently unpropitious. Mr.

Calvert made graceful adieux to the ladies, lightly saluted the master of the house and the Governor's lieutenant, and leaped upon his animal. A moment more and the two were cantering away, side by side, still looking back to the portico. When they were at length hidden by the bend in the road, Madam Trevor turned to the two girls.

"Virginia and Lucy, go you both and overlook your wardrobes and the linen in the press, and think out what is needed that we may buy at the sale to-morrow. Deborah may help you when she comes in. Charles, you ride to town, do you not? And, Vincent, I would have a moment with you before you go to the fields."

The little party dispersed as it was bid, Vincent following his mother into the house and to the west passage, where hung her garden hat, her lace mittens, her basket, and her pruning-knife. Thus accoutred, she led the way through the breakfast-room and out upon the terrace that overlooked the fairest spot in Madam Trevor's world—her garden. Here she paused, her eyes wandering for a moment over the scene about them, before she turned to her son.

"I wanted to speak to you, Vincent, of the sailing of the *Baltimore*. Within two or three weeks she will be going out again, 'tis likely."

"True. And what has that to do with us?" inquired the young man in some perplexity.

His mother sighed. "Vincent, I confess to anxiety. You are aware, I think, of the reason of Charles Fairfield's colonial appointment? You know why he sailed with you in the autumn when you came home to us to take your father's place here? You know why he has made his home in our house instead of in Annapolis with the other aides?"

"Yes, I know," responded Trevor, shortly.

"Remember, Vincent, it was your father's wish, it is your uncle's, it is mine, that—we should all be brought a little closer to old England by Virginia's marriage with her cousin."

"And the sailing of the *Baltimore*?"

"I am going to send off my jewels, my wedding pearls, to have them remounted in London for Virginia. And when they come home—that should be in August—when they come home, you and Charles must come to an understanding about your sister. Remember, Vincent, as the head of the family, you have a place to fill. There are certain matters about which you cannot afford to be careless—matters of more importance than the tobacco crop, or the price of slaves. I wished to ask you this morning if, when we drive in town for the dock sale to-morrow, you will see Captain Croft about intrusting the pearls to his keeping."

"Certainly, madam, if you wish it. Shall I take them to-morrow to him?"

"No. Not till just before the ship's sailing. They are too valuable to leave in a captain's cottage. This is what I had to say, Vincent. Go, now, to your fields, if you wish."

Vincent bent over and kissed her hand. Then he started towards the house. After half a dozen steps he halted suddenly and looked back, as though he would have spoken. His mother, however, had descended the terrace steps and was already bending over her flowers. So, after a little pause, he turned about again and continued thoughtfully upon his way.

CHAPTER II

Dr. Carroll's Idea



DEBORAH'S bedroom was extremely small. It was merely one corner of the west wing, partitioned off from the spinning-room and the great hand-loom; and there was barely room in it for her bed, dressing-table, chest-of-drawers, washstand, and two chairs. Besides these necessities, there were two windows and a strip of carpet, to be regarded as luxuries. Deborah herself, however, curtained the bed and windows after her own fashion, in white India muslin, put a ruffled cover over the dressing-table, displayed what ornaments she possessed prettily about the room, and so regarded it with satisfaction ever after. Her two windows both looked out over the back of the plantation, the flower-garden being directly below, the woods to one side, the tobacco barns at a distance. The room underneath Deborah's, which occupied the whole of the west wing on the ground floor, had been given to Sir Charles; and in the passage that connected this with the main house were the stairs.

When Deborah woke from her dreamless sleep on the morning after the doctor's visit, the first active thought in her brain was of the dock sale for that day. It was rather later than her usual hour of waking, and she hurriedly began her toilet. Presently, however, as she was loosening her hair, her eyes fell upon the bottle of *aconitum napellus* which she had brought to her room after its preparation on the day before; and at sight of it her hands dropped to her sides, and she stood still for a moment in contemplation. Then a little shiver ran over her, and she performed

something very like a shrug. "I don't like sick people," she muttered to herself, turning to sit down before her mirrored table.

If Deborah's words were quite honest, then certainly this morning she was looking forward to the dock sale with unusual pleasure. She had never before manifested any strong interest in these things. In fact, she had been known to say that they were tiresome. Men did not much frequent them; no young lady was allowed money to spend for herself; and the good housewives were always more interested in table-linens and utensils than ribbons or jewelry. Nevertheless, here, this morning, was Mistress Debby, plying her hair with more interest than she had had for it since the last assembly; and when it was all ringletted and quite smooth, she saw fit to use upon it a white ribbon that had never before been worn. Also, when Lucy cried at the door that she was to wear her blue lutestring petticoat and white muslin overdress, those garments lay ready upon a chair, though once or twice before, on like occasions, there had been some spirited conversation between Deborah and Madam Trevor before the young lady was willing to give up the perverse idea that her every-day holland was quite good enough for such an affair. When she was ready, and the lace mittens taken from their drawer, Deborah carefully placed her phial of distilled liquid in the neck of her dress, pushing it out of sight among the ruffles of her kerchief.

At nine o'clock the family coach, with four ladies inside it, left the house. Sir Charles, in scarlet and white, and Vincent, in bottle green, accompanied the vehicle on horseback. Vincent was reconciled to leaving his fields by the prospect of meeting some of the burgesses in the city and learning the details of yesterday's election of commissioners; while the lieutenant never needed strong urging to give a day to the mild amusements of the colonial town, with its coffee-house, its feeble imitators of English beau-ship, its jockey club, and what few pretty women were to be visited in the daytime. The clock on St. Anne's was

booming the half-hour as the coach crossed the bridge over the inlet at the foot of Prince George Street; and here, in the last house of the town, a quaint wooden cottage in the midst of a well-shaded yard, dwelt Captain Croft of the *Baltimore*. At its gate Vincent, with a little nod to his mother, stopped.

"I've an errand here," he called to Fairfield. "Will be at Carroll's by twelve. Do you dine with us?"

The aide shook his head. "Thanks, no. I'll go to the coffee-house with Curtis and Belmont, if I do not dine at the Governor's. Are you coming to the assembly later?"

"Yes. Till this afternoon, then," and Vincent dismounted at the gate, while the coach, with its single cavalier, all unconscious of the significance of Vincent Trevor's errand, went on again. At the new Bladen Street Sir Charles turned off towards the Governor's "palace," while the vehicle kept on towards the water-side.

Hanover Street was thronged with coaches and conveyances of all kinds, bringing in people from the country, while the ladies, and a few gentlemen of the city, picked their way on foot to the wharf. Every one was known to the Trevors, and madam and Virginia had their heads out of the windows continually, bowing and speaking to those whom they passed; while Lucy was now on one side, now on the other, peeping out with a covertly expectant air; and Deborah watched her, knowing very well what she sought, and knowing also that it would not be found.

Virginia saw her sister's restlessness with displeasure. She said nothing till they left the coach, but when at last they had alighted at the crowded dock, Miss Trevor took occasion to whisper into Lucy's ear:

"Lucy, had John Whitney seen you looking for him this morning, he would, I think, scarce have been overpleased with the manner of it."

And Deborah's eyes chancing to fall on the younger girl's face, saw her cheeks grow scarlet and her eyes fall with quick mortification.

The sight which met the eyes of the new-comers at the

wharves was one curious enough for a person of to-day. The broad wooden pier, at which were fastened a dozen or so of pinnaces and small boats belonging to folk who had come from far up the river or down the bay, had been converted for the time into a mart. All up and down, in regular lines, it was dotted with little platforms of wood, which were covered with articles taken from the ship and arranged here for sale, on the day and night before, by salesmen hired for the purpose from the various town shops.

The goods were the selection of London men who had made life studies of the colonial trade, and who knew, moreover, the various tastes of the various localities, north, south, tide-water, and inland. Certainly there was variety to be had here. Down one side of the dock were set forth on their platforms every possible household contrivance, with a good deal of furniture, and enough kitchen utensils, china and glass, to have set up a dozen ordinaries. Along the centre of the pier were materials, ready-fashioned garments, fine damasks that could not be made at home, and fancy articles of dress and the toilet. About these there hovered, throughout the day, a fair sprinkling of gentlemen, pricing scarlet and gold-laced coats, silk stockings, ruffles, and perfumed pomades with great interest. The third row of booths held agricultural implements, tools, coarse materials, such as felt and leather, together with a few books and papers.

When Madam Trevor, with the three girls, arrived at the pier, all aristocratic damedom seemed to be about the silks and damasks. Now, while carrying on a lively conversation with Mistresses King, Paca, Cradock, and Chase, Madam Trevor busily priced tabby silk petticoats and India muslins, of which she selected very pretty pieces for her daughters and Deborah. Mrs. Chase was casting longing glances at a satin bodice that Mistress Harwood held in her hands. But, as the two ladies did not speak, owing to the upper story of the Harwood house, there seemed to be but small hope of attaining to possession thereof.

"What monstrous pretty cloaks!" cried Mrs. King,

turning over a pile of short capes of crimson, blue, and white.

"'Tis too near summer now to purchase cloth," rejoined Mrs. Cradock, pursing her lips regretfully as she held one up.

"They are but two guineas, madam; of the latest cut; will continue in England just so for the space of five years—will wear longer than that," observed the salesman casually, with alluring indifference.

"I declare I'll take this blue one! It is of the most excellent texture, and 'tis always cool on the river in the evening."

"Virginia, will you have a white one?" asked her mother.

"No, thank you, madam. I have cloaks and to spare. With your permission, I will go look at the fans farther up. My last was broken at the Masons' rout."

"You may look at them, and I will join you presently. This crimson cape will suit Deborah. Would you like this, Debby?" She turned about to find only Lucy at her side.

"Where is she?" asked Madam Trevor of her daughter.

"On the other side of the pier, I think. Shall I call her?"

"At once. What can she be doing there?"

Lucy turned about and started to wend her way among the groups to the other side of the dock, where Deborah stood over a little collection of chemists' implements. Beside her, a sacred book in his hand, was a young man, at sight of whom Lucy hesitated, her face crimson, her heart beating unsteadily. She stopped almost still for a moment to watch them. Deborah was lovingly handling a siphon, while the young Puritan minister talked to her. Presently he caught sight of Lucy, who was constrained to move towards him again when she perceived the quick light that came into his face and the bow that he made. Deborah turned, and her mouth twitched a little as she perceived her cousin's fluttering nervousness.

"Master Whitney was speaking of you, Lucy," she said.

"I did myself the honor to inquire after the health of you and Mistress Virginia," said the young divine, embarrassment and pleasure adding a load of stiffness to his manner.

"Oh, thank you!—As you see—we are very well.—Debby," she added, reluctantly, "mother wants you at once to see if you would like a crimson cloak.—I am so sorry—I mean—"

"I would prefer this siphon a thousand times to a crimson cloak," murmured Deborah, more to herself than to her cousin.

Lucy heard her, however. "I'll ask, if you like, Debby, and then, perhaps, we may return and purchase it."

"I was just about to leave the wharf, having found the book I sought. May I accompany you to Madam Trevor and pay my compliments to her?"

Lucy beamed with delight, while Deborah consented with an absent-minded nod, and the three returned to the side of Madam Trevor, who greeted the Reverend Mr. Whitney with surprise and only the necessary politeness. Indeed this young Puritan was a sore subject in the Trevor family, whose youngest daughter had lost her faith, and, presumably, her heart, to the exponent of a rigid creed, inimical to every form of that Popery which was, just now, the only religion in disfavor with the erstwhile Catholic Province of Maryland.

The crimson cloak was purchased, the siphon was not; Master Whitney took a reluctant leave of little Mistress Trevor; and her mother, accompanied by Mrs. Paca, started to rejoin Virginia over the fans.

"Surely, Antoinette, you'll scarce return home before dinner to-day. Will you not drive up from here and take pot-luck—just a cold joint—with us?"

"Thank you for us all, vastly, Barbara, but we are bespoken by Dr. Carroll. You're most kind."

"I am sorry. I declare I had thought to see the doctor here to-day, but he's not been near the dock."

"Ay, and he rarely misses a sale. Doubtless, he has gone to the assembly."

Indeed, in one of the two places Dr. Carroll, according to unvarying habit, should have been. He happened, however, to be sitting in his own study, where, as one might say, he had waylaid himself. And he was by now sunk in a reverie so profound as to be totally oblivious of any of the proceedings of the outside world. His two maiden sisters bustled about the house preparing for their guests. His son Charles, a lad of seventeen, was in his own room being tutored in French and the classics by the priest who lived in the family. Thus the doctor had his study, which was his particular world, to himself; and the two people who formed the subject of his meditations were linked together by his thought for the first time. Fate and Fortune can work most curiously, and Destiny toss far indeed, when Claude de Mailly, of Versailles, and Deborah Travis, Virginia born, should have set out towards each other from birth, groping till they met, and for some little time after, too. Charles Carroll, being the instrument, not the confidant, of Fate, was now sitting among his books, perplexed and wondering at himself. That morning, for the second time within twenty-four hours, he had traversed the two blocks that separated his house from the ordinary of Miriam Vawse, to which Claude, at the doctor's instance, had been carried from the ship which had been so nearly the scene of his death. And very differently the young fellow looked to-day. He had been bathed; his hair was combed and clipped; his stubbly beard shaven off, his soiled clothes removed, and a clean, coarse linen shift substituted for the undergarments of foreign make and curious fastening which had much puzzled the excellent Mistress Vawse. And in this new guise all the innate refinement and gentleness of the de Mailly nature had once more come to the surface, and Dr. Carroll had no difficulty in determining that his new-found protégé was of even finer breeding than he had guessed on the previous day.

Claude's small travelling coffer had been brought up from the ship, and was placed near his bed, in the clean, sunny little colonial room under the eaves of the house. It must be confessed that Mistress Vawse had been through the trunk pretty thoroughly, after unlocking it with the awkward key which she had found in the Frenchman's clothes. But, with a delirious foreigner, whose disease requires quiet as much as good nursing, beside you, and a long day empty of incident to be gone through in silence, what woman could have resisted the temptation to examine so fascinating a boxful of clothes as this? And in justice let it be added, that Miriam Vawse would quite as soon have thought of assaulting the Governor in the street as of purloining the very smallest lace ruffle contained in this treasure-box; for her forbears and her honesty had come together from Kent in the year of grace 1660, along with certain choice recipes for cordials and strong waters, and the ancestral talent for nursing which Dr. Carroll in the old days had been wont to find so useful.

Meantime the genial doctor had completely wasted his morning in pondering over the almost impossible situation that he wished to bring about; and finally, as the Trevor coach drew up to the door, he left his study, resignedly determined to give his hopes to Chance for fulfilment.

The four ladies alighted from their vehicle, leaving behind them, to the care of the black footboy, a large number of bundles brought from the sale. Their host handed Madam Trevor sedately up the walk and into the house, where now Mistress Lettice Carroll, his sister, and Frances Appleby, his sister-in-law, both in starched and flowered paragon, with powdered locks atop of demure, quaint little heads, stood in the doorway to welcome the guests. When the ladies had removed their head-gear and scarfs up-stairs they returned to the drawing-room where, it being near the hour for dinner, young Charles Carroll and Father St. Quentin awaited them with the doctor. Madam Trevor, Virginia, and Deborah greeted

the priest with reverent friendship, for every Sunday they attended the mass which he performed in the Carroll chapel, where the few families of the old faith in Annapolis were accustomed to congregate; and, besides this, he had been kind enough to give some instruction to the Trevor girls and Deborah in the art of conversing in the French language. But Lucy hung uneasily back in the presence of Père Aimé, till he himself went forward and gave her a few gentle and impersonal words of greeting. Madam Trevor, beside Mistress Lettice, cast an annoyed glance at her daughter, but nothing was said on the subject. When Deborah, however, left St. Quentin's side, the doctor placed himself in her way and managed to ask, in a lowered voice, as she passed him:

"You brought the monkshood with you?"

And the girl nodded, gravely, "Yes." The next instant she was seized upon by young Charles, who regarded her less as a piece of femininity than some pretty thing, excellent to talk to, and a very good walker, produced by a beneficent nature for his especial benefit. They had wandered over to the window together, speaking of a forthcoming sail up the river, when Deborah's attention was caught by the voice of St. Quentin, who was addressing the doctor on an interesting topic.

"If it would not displease you, sir," St. Quentin had begun, "I should like to give Charles an hour's holiday this afternoon."

"And wherefore this leniency, good father?" queried Carroll, smiling good-humoredly.

"For a kind of charity, I imagine. This morning, as I walked the length of the street before breakfast, Mrs. Vawse came suddenly running out of her ordinary to ask if I would not go in with her at once, or at some hour of the day. She has lodged in her house, it seems, a foreigner—French—who arrived yesterday on the *Baltimore*, half dead with fever, and who was carried up from the wharves to be taken care of by her. It appears that he raves continually in French, and I fancy that the curiosity of good Mrs. Vawse

is growing strong within her, or else she would know how best to serve him, for she would have me come and translate for her some of his wild words, knowing that I have what she terms an unholy learning in that most ungodly tongue. As 'twas then too near the breakfast hour to obey her wishes, I promised to come later in the day."

"And so, thy curiosity being roused by the dame's, thou canst not wait thy visit till after vespers, eh?" And the doctor laughed.

"Seeing that it is a case of distress on the part of one of my countrymen, I would go at the first opportunity, on whatever pretence," returned the father, calmly.

"Well, then, you shall be off directly we finish dinner," answered Carroll, devoutly imploring Providence to come to his aid. "And—"

"And if that is done, I would have Deborah go with him," said Providence at once, speaking through Madam Trevor, "with a message to Miriam Vawse. 'Tis concerning the cherry brandy, Deborah. The last of hers was so excellent that I would have her make for us a keg this year. Tell her to take three trees of our fruit for it, and one tree for herself, which, together with two bushels of potatoes in the autumn, will pay for the making. You might learn her way of fermenting, while you are on the point. Then you may come back alone, if the father is not ready."

Come back! Yes, there must be a coming back. Dr. Carroll, however, was rubbing his satin knee in an ecstasy of good-humor; and Deborah herself, who, after a respectful bow to Madam Trevor, had shot one swift glance at the doctor, felt, as she returned to her conversation with young Charles, a curious quiver of the heart which she afterwards decided to have been one of the most delightful sensations ever known. A moment later Mrs. Appleby, who had left the room several moments before, entered with a little courtesy to announce dinner.

Once seated at the round, well-loaded table, conversation, by general assent, turned again to the Frenchman who had arrived on the *Baltimore*.

"As a matter of fact," confessed the doctor, willing to tell what he knew of the matter now, "it was I who sent him up to Mistress Vawse. I went down yesterday directly the ship was in, and, Croft having told me of the fellow, I got to see him. Faith, he was in a most execrable way! And besides, from what I could guess from his manner, and what Croft told me, he was a gentleman of rank. 'Twould have been pitiable enough to have had him die there on the docks; so I packed him, with my compliments, his box, and my black, up to Miriam, who had him in excellent shape when I went there this morning."

"Charles, really, you are monstrous disagreeable," ventured Mrs. Lettice, gently. "Why did you not bring the poor man here? I vow Miriam Vawse can never manage alone, and—"

"Nay, Lettice, he is too young for thee. Ten years ago 'twould have been a pretty enough romance, but—"

"Perhaps," struck in Madam Trevor, in time to prevent tears of mortification on the part of the little old maid, "perhaps I had better go, instead of Deborah. I might see the man, and find out—"

"Nay, now, Antoinette!" interrupted the doctor, in a great fright, while Deborah herself stirred a little anxiously, "you'll spoil all my purpose if you do that. Let Debby go on the cherry errand if she will, but you shall not see this Munseer till he's well and fit to receive you. Then, if he prove what I think him, I'll make him a dinner-party here, and he shall sit next to Virginia and opposite you, and you may study him at will."

"La! 'Twill be as bad for him as the time I had at the last assembly ball, when at supper I sat by old Master Randal, who cannot hear thunder, while on the other side was Carleton Jennings, who had next him Lora Colvill, that's to marry him in the autumn."

"And where was Sir Charles Fairfield?" queried little Mrs. Appleby, with unfortunate would-be slyness.

Madam Trevor's face changed suddenly, and Deborah colored.

"Sir Charles? Oh—with Debby, I believe," was Virginia's kindly, indifferent reply.

Thereupon St. Quentin, who had not been brought up in a cloister, looked approval at Miss Trevor, and adroitly changed the subject.

The meal coming to an end at length, the father immediately addressed Deborah on the subject of their visit:

"Miss Travis, my curiosity still burns. Will you take pity upon it and accompany me as soon as you can down to the ordinary?"

"I will come at once, if Madam Trevor permits," was the reply.

"Yes, get your hat and scarf, Deborah. In half an hour the coach will be here to drive us home. If the doctor will excuse your presence, you need not come back. We will stop for you on the way. You can wait in the sitting-room if Mistress Vawse is much occupied; for you would not, of course, go up-stairs."

Madam Trevor made the last remark in a tone that required no answer. Deborah merely courtesied and ran away for her hat; and, while the five ladies returned to the parlor, Dr. Carroll laid his hand on the priest's arm and said a few words to him in a low tone. St. Quentin raised his brows slightly, but gave no further sign of surprise. Then, as young Charles came loitering up, his father took possession of him, fearing that he might propose to accompany Deborah to the tavern. Five minutes later the priest and the young girl were on their way, Deborah with the warm phial, filled with her extract, pressing close over her steady heart.

St. Quentin spoke but once. "Dr. Carroll tells me that at his request you are to see this Frenchman," he observed, looking down at her; but he saw no sign of interest in her face as she answered, briefly:

"Yes."

As the two approached the quaint little building, with the small, swinging sign of "ordinary" over the door, its mistress, looking out of the window of the sick-room, wit-

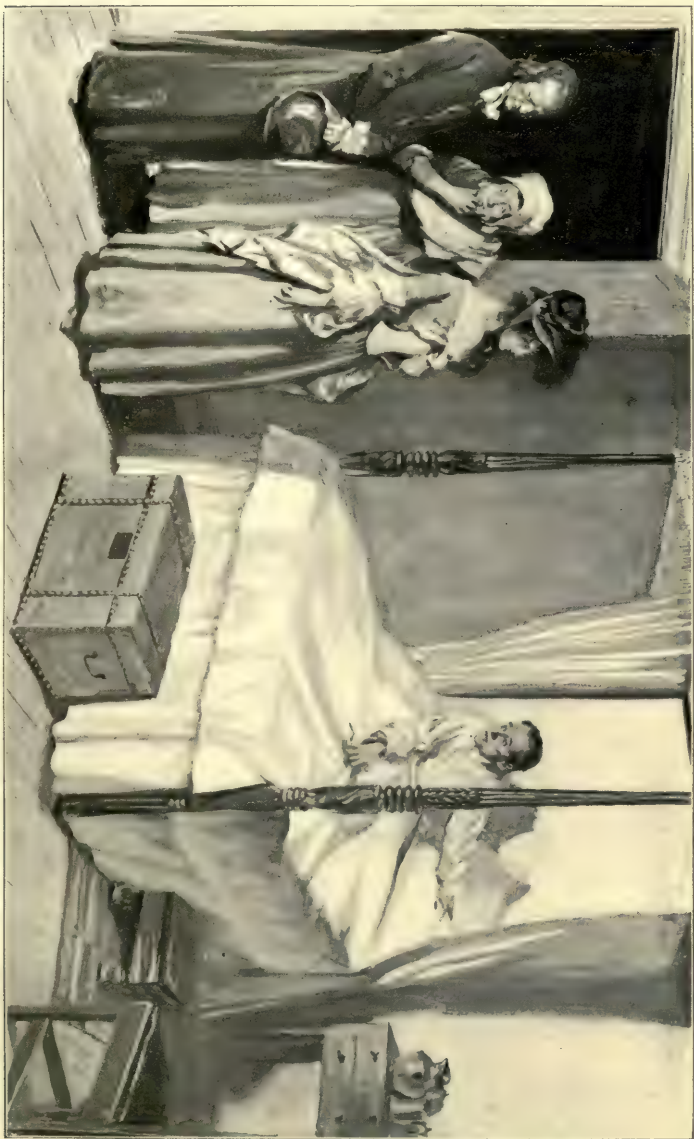
nessed the approach of her visitors. She ran quickly down-stairs to meet them, leaving her patient for the moment alone.

Claude was lying perfectly still on his clean colonial bed, conscious of nothing about him, vaguely feeling the change of air, perhaps, and the improvement of his surroundings over those of the dismal ship's cabin. But he was burning with fever, and, though the tossing of the vessel had got him into the habit of being still, he yet talked incessantly in his own language, while his wide-open eyes, roving aimlessly as they did, noted everything about him, and changed it into some familiar object of his rooms "at home." He saw Mistress Vawse leave the window, and cried after her anxiously:

"N'oubliez pas, chère Marquise, que vous m'avez promis le deuxième menuet!"

Then, through the stillness, came the murmur of voices from below. For an instant he listened intently. "Henri — tu es tard. Quelle heure est-il? Hein? Mesquin! Est-ce que votre Victorine est enfin moins cruelle?" Footsteps sounded on the stairs, but the sick man turned away his head impatiently. "Ne faites pas un tel bruit. Ma foi! J'ai une tête! Apportez-moi de l'eau, Chaumelle. —Ventre bleu!"

Claude sat suddenly up in bed with a new vision before his eyes. Very distinctly he beheld, entering the room, far in advance of his Marquise, and a step or two before some abbé, a floating picture of blue and white, with delicate ruffles, a matchless throat, grave bluish eyes, and hair neither dark nor light falling in confusion about two slender shoulders. More and more intently he sat and gazed, while his scattered senses strove at last to adjust themselves, and his breath came rapidly through his parted lips. Deborah, St. Quentin, and Miriam Vawse had stopped still, just as they entered the room. Deborah's eyes fell upon the rapt look of de Mailly, and were held spellbound. She scarcely saw what he was like, what were the color of the eyes she looked into, nor was she



“CLAUDE SUDDENLY SAT UP IN BED”



conscious of any part in the scene till Aimé St. Quentin quietly laid a hand upon her arm. She quivered and turned her head, till she beheld the priest's face. Then, suddenly realizing where she was, she passed her hand over her forehead and stepped slowly back, while the father, with an unreadable expression, advanced to the bedside, and Mistress Vawse, unable to comprehend just why she had stopped so long at the door, came into the room.

"You've some medicine, Miss Debby, the doctor told me," she said, going to the girl's side.

At the same moment Claude dropped back upon his pillows, muttering, with dry lips: "Du vin, Armand—pour l'amour de Dieu—du vin!"

Deborah looked up quickly, catching and understanding the words. "Have you something for him to drink?" she asked, before St. Quentin could speak.

"Ay. There's fresh water and a tankard here," responded Mistress Vawse, hurrying over to a small stand in one corner, where stood a pewter pitcher and mug.

"Then let me have the cup for a moment," said the girl, in a low voice, taking from her breast the little bottle of brownish liquid. Into the water which Dame Miriam brought, Deborah, with a steady hand, poured five drops of the *aconitum napellus*. "Now, make him take it—all," she said, recorking the phial.

St. Quentin took the cup and pressed it to the lips of de Mailly, who was still groaning with thirst. He drained the draught eagerly and lay back on his pillows murmuring thanks and closing his eyes for the first time since early morning. The priest, attracted by his manner and his face, lifted a chair to the bedside and sat down. Deborah, after looking at him once again, drew a long breath, and moved over to the window, when Miriam touched her arm.

"Leave the medicine here and come with me, Miss Debby, till I show you some of his things."

"What things? Wait. You must know about this, first. Never give him more than four drops in half a cup of water—and that not too often—twice a day, I think."

"Why? Is't dangerous?"

"Ten drops will kill an animal."

"Mercy on us! I'll be careful, then. But come, now, to the best room. There I've laid some of his things that were all rumpled with bad packing. My faith! Such satins and laces you never did see, and linen—as fine as your India muslin—and shoe-buckles!" With which information good Miriam led the way on tiptoe from the room, Deborah, half reluctantly, half eagerly, following her.

Across a narrow passage-way on the other side of the house was the "best bedroom" of the little old inn. Here, upon the high bed, carefully covered from the sun and any stray atom of dust with a clean linen sheet, lay half of Claude's wardrobe. As Mistress Vawse threw the cover aside Deborah uttered a little exclamation. Before her were the two court-suits of pink and white satin, with their delicate silver and silken embroidery, their elaborate waist-coats, point-lace ruffles, and silk stockings. Beside them lay orderly little piles of red-heeled slippers with paste buckles, linen shirts, a jewelled scabbard, two or three pins of diamonds, of which neither woman guessed the value, some rings, a white, three-cornered hat, two wigs, and an ivory snuff-box, in whose cover was the miniature of a woman, surrounded with pearls.

"How beautiful!" murmured Deborah, laying one finger gently on the embroidered pocket of the pink coat. "How beautiful! I have never seen aught like them."

"Nor I. Not on the Governor himself."

There was a silence as the two colonial women stood over the courtier's wardrobe, in this little bedroom of the far new world. Then again Deborah said, more to herself than to her companion:

"And the ladies—do they, too, have such things as these?"

"Oh, Miss Debby! Have you forgot Madam Trevor's wedding satin, with the veil and train? And the brocade she wore to the Governor's ball?"

But the girl shook her head impatiently. "Madam has nothing in the cedar chest so wonderful as this," she answered, lifting up a ruffle of Venice lace, as delicate as frost upon a window-pane. She looked at it lovingly for a long moment, and was about to replace it, when her eye fell on something which had lain beneath. It was a white kid glove, its back embroidered in tarnished gold and set with little blue stones, while in the centre of the arabesques was a crest, also in gold, unstudded. The girl turned it over, mechanically. Yes, there was something on the palm—the painting of a man's face and shoulders, a handsome face, if distorted a little by the brush; the face of a man comparatively young, something dull of expression, with a pair of great, sapphire blue eyes, and curling locks of bright gold tied loosely back, but unpowdered.

Deborah raised her eyes till they met those of Mistress Vawse.

"This—does not belong to him? Is not, I mean, a man's—gauntlet?"

"No, Miss Debby. When I took off his old suit yesterday, I found that glove pinned to his shirt on the left side, over—"

"His heart."

Mistress Vawse nodded. The glove dropped from Deborah's hand, and Father St. Quentin suddenly appeared at the door.

"The coach is coming, Deborah. Have you told Mistress Vawse of the cherries yet?"

"Oh no! I will as we go down."

"And how's the Frenchman, sir?"

The father smiled. "Luck is against my practice of French for the day, I fear. I must come to-morrow. It may be Mistress Deborah's medicine. He is sleeping like a child."

CHAPTER III

The Plantation



It was nearly four weeks since the *Baltimore* had set sail on her return voyage to England. The June days were flying. Peach-blossoms had long since fallen; cherries were daily reddening; and the turkeys had been turned into the tobacco fields for their annual feast off the insect life so destroying to young plants. In nine days more the commissioners from Annapolis were to make their departure for Lancaster in Pennsylvania, for the purpose of settling the long-delayed matter of purchasing charter rights from the Indians. It was, moreover, a Monday afternoon, and very warm, when Virginia Trevor came languidly up from the rose-garden towards the wide and shady portico of the house. In her hand she held two magnificent red roses, which she now and then raised to her face, they being in perfect contrast to her white gown and petticoat of palest yellow.

The portico was furnished in the fashion of a room, for in summer the family were inclined to spend more time there than in the house. Upon it now, in one of the comfortable chairs that surrounded a wicker table, sat the solitary occupant of the portico—Sir Charles. He had been here for an hour or so, ever since dinner was over, half awake, bored, wishing for amusement, but without energy to go in search of it. On Virginia's approach he rose, bowed, and went to the edge of the porch to hand her up.

"Thank you," she said, smiling a little. "It was a condescension. You look very sleepy."

"And you are, as ever, pleased to make sport of me,"

he responded, good-humoredly. "Have you no pity for a man weary of himself, his very sportiveness, and most mightily tired of the silence of the trees, the shadows, the sun, and the river yonder?"

"Troth, you are in a bad way," responded the young lady, seating herself at the table and taking therefrom a reticule which held some silken knitting-work.

There was a pause before Fairfield observed, idly, "My aunt's roses must be highly successful this year."

"Yes. These are very perfect."

"And are you going to be so selfish as to keep the two of them, when not even one is needed to complete your beau—"

"No, no. Stop!"

Sir Charles looked at her in surprise.

"Take both the flowers if you like"—she tossed them over to him—"but forbear any remarks on my appearance. I—I am not in the mood."

He fastened the roses upon his waistcoat, helped himself to a pinch of snuff, dusted his coat with a large handkerchief, and leaned towards her. "How have I offended, O Virginia the fair?" he asked, half lazily, half curiously.

The young lady shrugged her shoulders. "In no way at all. This is a Monday. Have you never noticed that I am always vaporish on Mondays?"

"No, I had not noticed. Oh! as I remember it! Tell me, what did you think yesterday of M. de Mailly? Is't the first time you have seen him?"

"Yes. And I think him a gentleman, and that his English accent is good. He looked rather pale. For the rest—why should I think of him at all, since his eyes are only for Deborah?"

"Deborah!" echoed the man, too quickly. He recovered himself, however. "Ah, well—he has seen her before. You and Lucy were strange to him."

"He has seen her before?" repeated Virginia, surprised.

"Several times. Didn't you know? Carroll told me 'twas her doses—medicines—that probably saved his life."

"Ah! So that is what has made her so eager over Miriam

Vawse." Virginia gazed thoughtfully out among the trees towards the river, of which a flashing glimpse was now and then to be caught through the feathery foliage.

"I thought you knew, cousin, or I would not have spoken. There was no wrong in the matter. Only Deborah is peculiar. She—"

"Oh, have no fear! I will not speak of the matter. But—I am not too fond of Deborah Travis; therefore I say nothing of her affairs. It might be better for her if I did."

"I think not," he answered, coolly. "Hark! There is some one coming up the road. Do you hear the beat of the hoofs?"

"Yes."

At that moment Jim, the groom from the stables, came running to the portico, and stood there expectantly facing the road, down which the sound of horses' hoofs was becoming plainly audible.

"Who is it, Jim?" asked Sir Charles.

"Mas' Thompson shout f'um road, minute ago, dat Mistah Rockwell ridin' up."

"Oh—Mr. Rockwell!" Virginia rose with a cold expression settling over her face, and Sir Charles shrugged indifferently as the visitor came in sight and presently halted his mare at the portico.

He was a florid, rotund, sandy-haired fellow, the rector of St. Anne's of Annapolis; conceited, a large eater, and a fair story-teller, but without brain enough to make himself obnoxiously disagreeable. He came up the two steps, wiping his face with an enormous handkerchief. His dress had been somewhat disturbed by the long gallop, and his bag-wig was awry. Before bowing to Virginia he stopped to adjust these matters, and then, having returned the slightly distant salute of the lieutenant, he observed, in a thin, non-clerical voice:

"Mistress Virginia, if it is not inconvenient, I am bent upon seeing your brother and Madam Trevor this afternoon."

"Vincent is in the fields, Mr. Rockwell. I will have him sent for."

"Pray do not do so, my dear young lady. I would not for the world put you to such trouble. No doubt he will be in later. I will see madam, your mother, first. If you could tell me where I may find her—"

"Will you step into the parlor, please? If Sir Charles will excuse me, I will call my mother at once."

The lieutenant bowed politely, and the two passed into the house, leaving Fairfield to sit down again with another shrug at the interruption that left him once more to his boredom. Presently, to his mild surprise, he perceived young Charles Carroll hurrying through the shrubbery in the distance, across the road.

"Carroll! Oh, Carroll!" shouted Fairfield; but, if the boy heard him, he made no reply, merely quickening his pace a little till he was out of sight.

As a matter of fact, young Charles did not want to hear. It was for Deborah that he had come to the plantation, and he was going to seek her in the spot where she was most likely to be found. Having happily escaped the continued notice of Sir Charles, he reached the back of the Trevor house, and there came upon the object of his search, seated, Turk-fashion, by the still-room door, surrounded by a group of black, wide-eyed pickaninnies, to whom she had been telling ghost-stories in their own dialect. It was one of her favorite forms of amusement when she was a little lonely; and the small mental effort required in concocting the endless tales was more than compensated for by the unwavering devotion to her of every black imp on the place. It was no great acquisition, perhaps, to one's acquaintance, but it was one of Mistress Travis' pleasures, and one not yet forbidden by Madam Trevor.

Young Carroll was close upon her before he was perceived; and when she beheld his expression, she burst into so sudden a peal of laughter that her audience jumped in terror, imagining it to be the latest demoniacal accomplishment of the ghost. At sight of Master Carroll, however,

they realized that their afternoon was over, and all but one ran off to the quarters. This small fellow, Sambo by name, aged five, elegantly clad in a brown holland shirt that was many shades lighter than his skin, clung to Miss Debby's arm, pleading for more; for he was court favorite, and might do as he chose.

"I'm so glad you've come, Charles," she said, holding out a hand, which he clasped and shook as he might a man's.

"I have the pinnacle. Can you come sailing now?"

"Oh yes! I've finished my spinning"—she made a little grimace—"and the knitting, and have crushed two bushels of rose-leaves for distilling, and have told three ghost-stories—and now I may sail, I think."

"Must I ask madam?" he queried, dubiously.

She laughed. "No. There now, Sambo, run away. No, I can go without asking her."

Very gently Deborah put away the child who still clung to her skirts, and started off, beside her companion, towards the river. Virginia and Sir Charles, from the portico, saw them pass the shrubbery. Fairfield repressed an exclamation. He would have given much to have been in the boy's place; and Virginia, catching a glimpse of his face, knew it, but was silent.

"I've got that Frencher—de Mailly—in the boat," observed Charles, as if offering a bit of off-hand information. "I like him, and he asked to come. What's the matter?"

Deborah had stopped short in her walk. "*He there!*" she cried, looking anxiously at her rumpled dress, knowing that her hair was all awry, and beginning to pull down the sleeves that were rolled to her shoulders. "Oh, you might have told me! How could you have let me come looking so?"

"You didn't mind me, though," returned Charles, not over-pleasantly. "Come, let the sleeves stay up, and don't bother with your hair. You're a thousand times prettier so, if that's what you want."

Deborah looked up at the boy with a little, mischievous



"SURROUNDED BY A GROUP OF PICKANINNIES"

smile. "I know that I'm better so. That's why I let it stay—for you," she said; and Charles, near enough to manhood to make the inference, had a momentary impulse to fall then and there at her feet. He did not guess, however, why the added color had come into Deborah's cheeks, or that there was a quick tremor at her heart as they approached the boat.

The wharf belonging to the Trevor place was hidden from the house by the foliage of the peach-orchard on the river-bank. Claude de Mailly, waiting in the little pinnacle, beheld the two figures approaching him among the trees, and made his way along the bowsprit that he might help the young girl into the boat. He bowed gravely as she came along the pier, regarding her dishevelment of attire in surprise as well as admiration. It was but yesterday noon that he had seen her in very different state, and had thought her charming then. But now—! She accepted his proffered hand, and stepped carefully past the boom and down into the pinnacle, though Charles had never seen her do such a thing before. Usually she leaped past him and was at the tiller before he could cast the painter off.

"Better let me take the steering to-day, Deborah," observed Charles, as they swung away from the dock.

"Oh—does mademoiselle herself steer at times?" asked Claude, with the quaintly twisted s's and r's that Deborah loved to hear.

"Sometimes," she replied.

"River or bay, Deb?" inquired Carroll, bluffly.

"The river; and let us beat up along the other shore. 'Tis prettier."

"All right. Mind the sail now."

Deborah obediently ducked her head, but Claude, not understanding the observation, and being turned from the canvas, sat still as the heavy boom swung over. Charles shouted, and Deborah seized his arm, pulling him down just in time. When they were under way again, de Mailly sat straight and looked curiously at the sail.

"Ma foi comme j'étais bête!" he observed, smiling at the girl, who returned his glance. The incident had broken the little stiffness of her manner, a fact which the Frenchman perceived with relief. "You saved my unfortunate head another blow, Mistress Travis. I thank you for it."

"I am glad that I saw you," she answered. "Charles and I have both been knocked over with it. One does not always see."

"Faith, I should think not! I had Deborah senseless for a quarter of an hour here once—"

"Nonsense, Charles. It was not five minutes."

"Humph! It seemed half a day to me. There, are we near enough the bank now?"

"Yes. Let her out, and run free with the wind."

With this command, and a sigh of content, Deborah sank down at Carroll's feet, laid her head upon the seat, and said no more. Charles could feel a bit of her calico ruffle over his foot, and her shoulder close to his arm, and was perfectly happy in watching the sail and feeling the tiller quiver in his grasp. The stranger reclined on a cushion in the bottom of the boat, facing the stern, his eyes resting half the time upon Deborah, and half the time upon the silver wake of the little boat.

A more perfect afternoon the gods never contrived. The sun was by this time well on its descent, the west was a glare of glory, and the whole river caught its reflection and poured an endless golden ripple along the shores, upon whose deep velvet turf the yellow shadows were lengthening. From the bay, eastward, came a stiff salt breeze that stirred the lazy June air till it had revealed every flower-breath in the land, and was as rich as only June air can be. Farther up, the river narrowed and twined between its banks till Charles was obliged to tack in order to catch the wind. For the most part the shores were wooded and still; but every now and then came an opening through which one caught the glimpse of a red brick house with white windows and pillared portico gleam-

ing through a mist of birch or willow branches. Occasionally a gull, just in from the ocean, would dart, arrow-like, into the water, churning it white with his dive, to reappear presently, holding a captive fish, scales flashing in the light, fast in his beak.

Claude de Mailly noted it all—all this natural beauty and perfumed silence that his life had lacked. It was entering into his nature at every pore of the flesh, and was to him as milk to a man dying of hunger and thirst. Only one unsatisfied desire was in his heart. And yet, was it easy to mourn, even for that, when, just before him, graceful, unconscious, careless, pure of brow, clear of eye, and with that mad hair clustering all about her neck, lay another woman, whose glance, every now and then encountering his own, would droop so swiftly that he could see the whiteness of her eyelids and the long, curling lashes that touched her delicately flushed cheeks? A new feeling was welling up in the courtier's heart—something that had never come before. He let it stay, nor tried to understand the reason for its being. But he knew that he was moved by the sight of Deborah, and instinctively he divined that his emotion was being echoed in her.

Deborah was cold, with a cold which the summer sun had no power to warm. But she had not found that chill in the salt, eastern wind. She knew and understood but half that was taking place this afternoon. She had waited for its like, without knowing what it might be, for a long time. Sir Charles had brought her something that emanated merely from himself; but here, at once, in the first glance ever given her by this other, while he had raved in fever, was all that she had dreamed of, and infinitely more. Had it been some weight that was crushing out her heart, she could only have opened wide her arms and fiercely welcomed it. It was not all de Mailly either, she thought, vaguely, as she felt Charles move the tiller. It was the whole day, the place, the sunlight, the river, even the imperturbable Carroll, who was silent for the sake of the air, and the water beneath the keel of his boat. The

Severn was still swollen from heavy spring rains, and the shallows of later summer were covered now. Young Carroll presently ran the pinnace so close to the high north bank that a willow, growing in the water, sent out one pale, feathery arm that brushed Claude's head in passing. Deborah watched a long leaf draw over his neck, just below the ear. Taking the bough as it reached her, she pressed it half unconsciously to her forehead, looking up to find de Mailly smiling into her eyes. But when they emerged from the shadows he was looking beyond her, down the river, though the smile lingered still about his lips. Charles Carroll did not notice the incident. He was thinking of his pretty feat in steersmanship.

"Well, Deb," he said at last, "if I'm to get home for supper, we'll have to come about."

Deborah sighed, and acquiesced.

"Mind your head, then, sir," cried the boy, laughing.

And as de Mailly bent carefully over, he answered blithely: "Faith, sir, had you kept me out half an hour longer, I should so have lost my head that the boom could not have menaced it."

"Ay, the river's pretty."

"The most beautiful spot in the world—and seen with the most charming companions," returned the Count, bowing towards Deborah, but moving up to the high side as they came into the wind.

Deborah knew instantly that their afternoon was over, and she was chagrined that she had allowed him to be weary of her. Pushing Charles from the tiller, she suddenly took his place.

"There, now you shall rest, or unfasten the sheet and manage that while I wake myself up!" she said. And young Charles obediently moved up beside Claude and took unto himself the management of the sail, while Deborah, sitting straight to the freshening wind, shook herself out mentally, and fastened her thoughts upon the tiller. Now, indeed, as she brought the boat so close into the wind that the water swirled gently over the low side, de Mailly

turned towards her again. He was willing to be upset if she liked; but he did not care to have an accident occur because he had made her absent-minded. Deborah, however, was not thinking of him at all. Her skilful hand was making the little vessel fly, and there would be no false moves on her part. When they came about upon the second tack the sail flapped for but one-quarter of a second. As it filled with a puff, the little yacht fairly leaped ahead.

"Jack me, Deb, if that wasn't the prettiest turn I ever saw!" cried young Charles, as he manipulated the sheet.

"'Twas half you, Charlie. I must have let her go had you not brought her up just at the right instant."

"And did Mistress Deborah learn the management of a boat under you, sir?" asked Claude.

"Mine and my father's."

Claude settled back and tried to bring his mind to other subjects; but for the moment Deborah had completely fascinated him. He could do nothing better than compare her to all those other women to whom she was indeed incomparable, to try to fathom the many expressions he had seen in her eyes, and seek to determine which was the normal one. And so they left behind the upper windings of the river and neared at last the wharf of the Trevor place. The sun hung low over the tree-tops as Deborah stepped from the boat and held out her hand to Charles.

"Indeed, I am beholden to you. We have never had so beautiful a sail."

"I trust, Mistress Travis, that it will not be the last in which I shall be permitted to join you?" put in Claude, hastily, as she courtesied to him, and would have been off.

"I trust not; but the pinnacle is not mine. It is with Charles and Dr. Carroll that you must plead."

So, with that small politeness, Deborah turned towards the shore, wondering a little why she should have finished so perfect an afternoon in annoyance with herself and those who had been her companions. She passed slowly up through the orchard and across the road at the top of the

bank. The plantation grounds seemed utterly deserted. The family must be at supper. Through the trees she caught a glimpse of the empty portico. Hurrying a little, she went close to the doorway of a small, vine-covered arbor which was but rarely used. Nevertheless, to-night, as she passed it, there came the sound of muffled sobs from within. Deborah halted, hesitated for an instant, and then entered the little place. Inside it was dusky, but she perceived at once the glimmer of something white in a corner.

"Who is it?" asked the girl, sharply.

The figure stirred, and perhaps made some attempt to reply; but the only result was another hoarse sob.

"Lucy! Lucy! what is it?" cried her cousin, running to her quickly. "Nay, now, pray don't cry so! Is't only Mr. Calvert's going with the commissioners, so that you mayn't have him to take you to Master Whitney's church? Listen! Virginia told me she'd go herself with you there."

"Oh, Debby dear, no, it's not that at all now," came more quietly.

"What, then? Try and tell me about it, Lucy. See, you are all crumpled up. Come out of this horrid place, and tell me about it. Come, now—come."

It was seldom that Lucy Trevor would have refused such persuasion, for she was a gentle little thing, and loved to be led. Now, however, she resisted all Deborah's kindly efforts to help her to rise, and only crouched closer in her corner, shaking with grief. Finally Deborah knelt and took the little dishevelled figure in her arms. Lucy had clung to her for a second, when a new voice interrupted them.

"Lucy—are you here?"

Virginia stood in the doorway. Lucy made no answer, but Deborah said: "Lucy's here, Virginia. What has happened?"

The elder daughter of the Trevors came forward and stood looking down at the two figures on the ground. "The

Reverend George Rockwell has asked for Lucy's hand. She should be most proud. Come, Lucy, supper is standing, and the wedding's not till to-morrow. Why do you bear yourself like a child? Good God, Lucy, do you fancy a woman ever gets the man she loves?"

CHAPTER IV

Annapolis



THE commissioners left Annapolis for Lancaster on the 18th day of June, which was three days earlier than had been originally planned. After their departure Governor Bladen sighed with relief, packed up his black satins and official orders, and hied him to his country-place to recuperate for the fall sessions. By the 1st of July Annapolis was deserted. All of the old families had gone to their summer houses up the river or down the bay, and it was remarked that Dr. Carroll, who chose to stay in town, and Rockwell, whom he sincerely hated, must bear each other company through the summer. But Dr. Charles was not yet reduced to the companionship of a Church-of-England clergyman. He had taken an immense fancy to Claude de Mailly, of whom he saw as much as Claude would let him. Indeed, he had given the Frenchman more than one invitation to leave the tavern of Miriam Vawse to make a permanent abode in his own house, and could not quite understand why he had been refused. But Claude was well satisfied where he was; and had there the indispensable feeling of independence. Few guests ever came to the little tavern after the close of the spring assembly; and, when an occasional traveller did stop overnight, monsieur ate in his room, went to the coffee-house, or remained to make acquaintance of the stranger, as he chose.

On sailing for the English colonies it had been Claude's idea to travel through them, when he arrived, as rapidly as possible, courting what adventure and danger he

could, and to keep his thoughts enough occupied to crush, as best he might, his hopeless homesickness. But, after living in Annapolis for a week, he found that it might be a very endurable thing to exist in Annapolis for a year. The air was different, in this new land. New thoughts and new occupations had come, after his illness, and he ended at last by making a very pleasant salute to the Fate which had cast his lines in these places, determining to take the goods which the gods and Miriam Vawse provided (at moderate cost), and remain in the little city till discontent again knocked upon his door. Certainly, he was not lonely. Through Dr. Carroll and Vincent Trevor he had made acquaintance with every gentleman, young or old, in the town. They received him extremely well, though, it must be confessed, some of them balked at his title. "Bah! Every Frencher's a count!" he heard Mr. Chase cry out one morning at the market, and thereafter he requested to be presented simply as M. de Mailly to what men he chanced to meet. Through the influence of Sir Charles he had been given the freedom of the coffee-house, which was really the gentlemen's club; and he was asked to the last assembly of the season, which had taken place just before the departure of the commissioners, and which he did not attend.

Upon an afternoon of the first week of July, Charles Fairfield, wofully bored with the weather and the lack of something to do, rode into town at an early hour with intent to amuse himself at any cost, and a pruriency towards a stiff sangaree as the beginning of matters. The second want drove him down Church Street to the coffee-house. On arriving at the jockey-club-room he found its only occupant to be George Rockwell. The Queen's clergyman greeted him with great urbanity. How well would Rockwell have loved his brethren had all of them been knights, and the eldest sons of wealthy families! The sangaree was quickly forthcoming. He drank with Sir Charles, and Sir Charles drank with him, and they drank together, till the weather was of less importance and spirit acted

upon spirit with delightful effect. Then it was that the divine opened a more intimate conversation.

"Charles—my dear Sir Charles—were you aware—ah—of the fact that it is my hope and my intention—my intention, sir—to have the honor, at some day not far distant, of becoming, when two events shall have taken place, your—ah—brother-in-law, as it were?"

"What the—oh yes! Ha! ha! ha! Oh yes! You're after Lucy. To be sure, I recollect. Lucy! Well, George, I wish you well—you know that. But she won't have you."

"Won't have me?—Um. Madam Trevor has all but promised her."

"The more fool Madam Trevor.—Oh, I beg pardon. No offence, sir. But, as I hear, the affections of the lady in question are already engaged."

"Engaged?" The rector looked startled for an instant. Then he recovered himself. "You have reference, I presume, to that Puritan psalm-singer, John Whitney. Oh, I'll engage to cure the pretty child of him! She is coy with me now; excuses herself when I call, has vapors when her mother insists; refuses to permit me to salute her hand. But I have no fear, Sir Charles. Consider my position. I shall get her, have no fear."

"Still, I have observed that she attends your rival's church," remarked Sir Charles, maliciously.

The rector emptied a glass. "If you'd but help me there," he said.

"I help you! Damme, what can I do, George?"

"Since Benedict Calvert left the city 'tis Mistress Virginia, your future wife, who takes her sister to the Puritan meetings. Now, Fairfield, if you—if you would be so monstrous obliging as to speak a word to your young lady in—ah—my favor, I'd be forever beholden to you."

Sir Charles laughed unpleasantly. "Lord, Master Rockwell, d'ye think I'm married yet? What possible right have I to address my cousin on any subject but—the one I most avoid with her?"

"The one you most avoid? And what, pray, is that?"

"The tender matter of love, George. Love and Virginia are—well—strangers in my heart."

"Good Heavens! Are you *not*, then, to wed the lady?"

"Damme, my good fellow, I don't know! I would to Heaven I did know—the state of another person's affections."

"Another! Oho! Aha! Another—truly this is gallantry! In my ear, I beg, whisper the name."

"The name? There's only one woman's name in the world," cried Sir Charles, dramatically, a little overbalanced with the sangaree. "Deborah! Deborah! Deborah! 'Tis she, the fairest petticoat in the colony. D'ye hear?"

"I've heard that she was dangerous," responded Rockwell, chuckling with interest. "But is it true, is it possible, Charlie, that you are bewitched enough by this young—hum—Pomona—by this young Pomona, to be indifferent to the more glittering charms of Miss Trevor?"

Sir Charles sat him down in a chair and sighed. It was a true love-sigh, such as there could be no mistaking in those days. "I love her to distraction," was his inadequate observation.

"Now I wonder," reflected the rector, aloud, "I wonder if, in such case, distraction and marriage are terms synonymous?" He lifted his head, scratched his large neck delicately with his finger-nail, and regarded the young man from that height with humorous serenity.

"Devil take me—how can I, George? They expect me to take the other—Virginia. And there's the dower—and my aunt's favor—and my own dependence—and, egad, I don't know!"

"Then you won't marry her, eh?"

Fairfield grew a little red. "I must. She's a kind of cousin, too, you know."

"Oh, tut! A difficult' matter. Hum!—Ha!—When—a—you are prepared to assist me in getting Mistress Lucy, my services, or, rather, one of them, is at yours."

"The marriage? Oh—St. Quentin 'ud do that. He—"

"Not St. Quentin's service, or—one that he would not perform."

"Eh? What are you getting to, Rockwell?"

The divine advanced with large solemnity to where the young man sat, bent over him, and said, in a broad whisper: "Now look you, Fairfield, there's a certain ceremony of which the law takes no count, certain words being left out.—A lady would accept it—" He stepped back a pace. "When you desire such a service, terms might be got at between us. Once in England with your bride, the marriage growing cold—" he waved his hand, shook his head, and so finished the proposition.

Sir Charles gave him a long look. The color had left his face. He rose slowly, turned his back for a moment, and took a pinch of snuff. As he faced the other again he remarked, without much expression: "What a cool-headed beast you are, Rockwell."

"Sir!"

"Yes. But don't fight me to-day. That service—" he stopped, unwilling to go on.

"You may want it yet," finished the rector, insinuatingly. .

But Fairfield did not commit himself. Before he had a chance to reply a servant of the house opened the door.

"Beg pardon, sirs, but young Mr. Carroll and Mr.—the Frencher, are below, and, not being regulars—"

"Yes, yes, show them up at once," cried the lieutenant, with relief in his tone.

The servant disappeared, and George Rockwell turned upon his heel. He was not a little irritated at the result of the foregoing conversation, and he remained silent till quick steps sounded on the stairs outside, the door reopened vigorously, and young Charles, with de Mailly at his shoulder, gayly entered the room, bringing with them a new atmosphere.

"Good-day, Fairfield! Good-day, Mr. Rockwell!—Faith, you both look wofully! Is the sangaree ill made?"

The boy was in a gale of spirits, and ran about the room tasting of the liquor, looking down out of the window, and laughing at the three others. Claude saluted the gentlemen more quietly, observing to Sir Charles:

"I perceive that we have interrupted you. I crave pardon. I sent the man to see if you were disengaged."

"You are mistaken, monsieur. I assure you, in my turn, that your arrival could not have been more agreeable.—Confound it, Charles, have you a megrim or a frenzy? Where have you been, sir?"

"To a cock-fight in the Prince George Street pit. You should have been with us. Captain Jordan's bird against Jack Marshe's. Jack's died. The secretary will be in a rage. I won three pounds, though."

"You see, it was the first I had witnessed," explained de Mailly.

"Devil take me, why didn't you hunt me out, Charles? I've been eternally bored for a week.—You lost to him, de Mailly?"

Claude nodded. "As he said, a small bet—seventy-five francs."

Fairfield looked at him curiously. Three pounds did not seem to him small for a cockpit wager; but he would not have voiced this idea to the foreigner for double the amount. He turned again to young Charles.

"Odds my life, Charlie, you've been drinking. What's it mean? Where's your tutor?"

Carroll laughed joyously. "Shooting plover in the west marsh with father. I've a holiday, and M. de Mailly is making it with me."

Rockwell frowned rather ill-humoredly, as though a preachment lay upon his tongue, and Sir Charles was about to speak again, when from below came the trampling of horses' hoofs and a little chorus of voices, while Carroll cried from the window: "Vincent Trevor, William Paca, and Carleton Jennings! They've stopped here."

"Ah—they'll be up presently. Rockwell, will you risk

another tankard? They'll have apple-brandy and Madeira. Vincent scorns rum."

The rector shrugged, vouchsafing no active consent, and after a moment or two the three young gentlemen clattered into the room. There was a chorus of greeting, and Trevor introduced young Paca to Claude, who had not seen him before. Jennings flung himself into a chair, flicking the dust from his coat-sleeves with a riding-crop. Paca sat upon the long table; and Vincent, after drawing off his gloves and flinging them, with his hat and whip, upon a chair, went to the door and called lustily for a decanter of Madeira with glasses.

"I ordered a sangaree when we were down," observed Jennings to Paca. "Trevor's thirst is aristocratic, but too small."

"And we'll all drink with you both," put in Fairfield, with sociable impudence, while Rockwell smiled approval.

"And now for the affair in hand," pursued Jennings, when the party were seated. "We've a race in prospect, Fairfield, that will take four months' pay to back."

"Eh! What's that? I back the winning side, of course."

Trevor laughed. "Nay, then, Charlie, will you desert me?"

"Egad, Vin, you're never going to take to racing! You've no stables."

"Castor needs none."

"Castor! Oh! By my life, Vincent, he might do. Vastly fine points, gentlemen. Rough-bred; but where you'd find a better—"

"He's pledged already, then," observed Jennings to Paca, smiling.

"Why, who will you run against, sir?" asked Rockwell, interested, despite his ill-humor; for, of all things, he loved the turf.

"Paca's filly, Doris. She's young for my two-year-old; but Will is to enter her for the fall cup, and wants to give her practice."

"Pretty beast, Doris. I stake on her, I think. Are the dates fixed?"

"No, deuce take it! there's the bother. Trevor has no jockey. Castor will carry weight, and there's not a rider in town over four and a half stone. Five would ride him; no less—eh, Vincent?" queried Paca, and Trevor nodded.

There was a short pause, in the midst of which a servant with the wine and sangaree appeared. The room drank with Trevor, and two or three afterwards turned to the pewter mugs which held the planter's favorite beverage. Claude had been listening intently to the talk concerning the race, and, his ear being well accustomed to the colonial accent, he had gathered the gist of all that was said.

"My man, Tom Cree, might know of some fellow who would do for you, Vincent. I think you could trust him if you cared to look about in that way," suggested Paca, after some hesitation.

Vincent bowed. "Certainly I'd trust your man, Will. But I've some objections to that course. I've no intention of starting stables. I run Castor merely to try your Doris and test my own animal. I don't want to be known as deeply interested in the turf. Get a professional rider fastened to you even by one race, and—poof! You all know what it means."

The group nodded. Vincent Trevor was a man highly respected by all of them. He was quiet, silent, of excellent judgment, a little given to over-Toryism, no prig, but holding fast to strong principles. His friends knew his manner of life, and never expected him to step beyond its bounds. In the present case they all perceived his position, and his silence was rather dubious, till Claude de Mailly most unexpectedly broke it.

"This race—it would not be in public?"

"Oh no. Certainly not," responded Sir Charles.

"It would be—on a track, or through the country, à l'anglais?"

"Oh, track, of course—not a steeple-chase—eh, Trevor?" queried Jennings, and Vincent nodded, looking to de Mailly for more.

"And the leagues—miles, I mean—how many?"

"Track's a mile and a quarter. Shall it be twice round?"

"Castor will hold twice, but would you try Doris so?"

"Tut, tut, Vincent! Doris isn't china. She'll not break so vastly easy. Egad, we'll make it three rounds, if you like!"

Vincent smiled. "I did not mean to offend you, Will," he said.

Paca began an apology at once, when Claude interrupted: "If you would permit me, Mr. Trevor, I will ride your horse for you."

The five men and Charles Carroll sat perfectly still and stared. De Mailly, beholding their amazement, and not understanding it, burst into an infectious laugh, at which Sir Charles immediately caught.

"A fine joke, damme, an excellent joke!" he cried.

Claude stopped his laughter at once. "Indeed, gentlemen, it was not a jest. I was quite in earnest, I beg you to believe," he declared.

"Pray, sir, then why did you laugh? I see nothing to laugh at in so serious a matter," remarked Rockwell, with an air of injured dignity.

"'Twas my fault, parson," retorted Fairfield, still smiling; for his humor, though English, was still not yet of the colonial type.

"Then you really make a serious offer to ride Castor in the race?" demanded young Carroll, curiously.

"I offer. It is for Mr. Trevor to refuse me, if he wishes."

"'Tis not that, monsieur, but you see—it is vastly strange form for a gentleman to ride a track against a jockey. To be plain, M. de Mailly, since you are a stranger to our customs—none of us would do such a thing."

Claude smiled and shrugged. "Thank you, sir, I was aware of the English custom in this case. But I am here to amuse myself. I make you an offer, sir. Examine my weight and my build, and try my riding before you refuse it."

He stood up for the small group to judge his weight, and

this they proceeded to do with calm assurance and unsparing observation.

"Not much over five stone, I stake my oath!" remarked Jennings, measuring the slender figure with his eye.

"A shade over. Might train a little," commented Paca.

"Not much strength," whispered Fairfield, dubiously, to Vincent.

"I shall not be pulling the horse in after the first half-minute," observed Claude, quietly.

"Ahum—can you ride?" grunted Rockwell, when there came a pause.

De Mailly flushed. "There is a story that when M. de Voltaire was in London he was asked by a lady if he had ever tried writing verses when he was in love, as was the custom among English gentlemen."

"Well—what then?" retorted the reverend, irritably.

Claude turned and stared at him with such a mixture of scorn and laughter in his eyes that Trevor hastily broke in:

"Of course M. de Mailly rides, and, no doubt, excellently. But perhaps it might not be amiss if he would come out to the plantation in the morning to try my horse. And if you'll all be there to-morrow by—eleven o'clock, we'll examine Castor and give him a mount in my paddock to—"

"To see whether my riding is fit for such a speed," added the proposed jockey, with a mixture of wounded vanity and sarcastic pride. He was beginning to regret rather bitterly his impulsive and wholly generous offer. In time he might become accustomed to English manners. Just now they hurt him more than he would have confessed. His whole early life had been one which had fostered his natural buoyant impulsiveness of spirit, and had made him young beyond his years. It had been called his "pose." But that pose, which was more than half nature, was a singularly unfortunate thing for a man thrown upon the world, in a strange country, among new manners, through which he must find his way. And just now, while the Englishmen concluded various arrangements for their plan, he was struggling with his temper, and only won the battle when

Trevor and Rockwell finally rose to depart. Vincent was returning to the plantation, and the clergyman, with Lucy in his mind, purposed accompanying him.

"Coming, Charles?" asked his cousin.

Fairfield hesitated. The plantation held out no special inducement to him. His blood had been heated, and he was eager for some excitement after a long period of inertia. "I think not, Vincent, since you have company. If Jennings, here, cannot put me up for the night, I'll go up to Mrs. Miriam's, or to Reynolds'."

"I'll ride with you, Trevor. I can cross the river at King's Ferry. My people will expect me to-night. Our town house is shut."

"Very well. I leave you, then, Charles. You'll ride out in the morning with M. de Mailly and Carleton."

"Ay, and me, too," called young Carroll after him. "I'll see Castor rode with the rest of you, and, egad, I'll go to the race as well!"

"We shall be delighted, Charles," replied Vincent, as he left the room.

"Until to-morrow, then. Good-day, sir," said Paca, bowing with courtly politeness to Claude, who liked him thenceforth.

The four who remained in the jockey-club-room sat silent together for some moments after they had been left alone. Then Claude, looking at young Charles, rose.

"Come, Mr. Carroll, since we are making your holiday together, let us go and finish it with a supper at my inn. You will forgive me, messieurs"—he turned to Sir Charles and Jennings—"you will forgive me that I do not propose a party of four. After the excitement of the cock-fight this afternoon, and my ride for to-morrow, we will make our evening quiet. You might be perhaps—how do you say—*ennuyé*—by it. Where shall we join you to-morrow?" He smiled gently as he beheld the lieutenant regarding him with knitted brows. Indeed, to Fairfield it seemed that the Frenchman had read his mind, and was

bound to thwart his hopes of arranging a gentleman's night in Jennings' company.

"Come, come, monsieur, be more lenient. Dine with us at the 'Blue Balls' and join us in a game of *écarté* later."

"Eh, yes!" cried young Charles, eagerly. "'Twould be vastly more fun!" He pulled de Mailly's sleeve.

"No, no, Charles, not you! It—your father—damme, you ain't out of school yet, you know," stammered Jennings, voicing Fairfield's thought.

Carroll flushed hot with anger, and Claude bit his lip before he answered, quietly: "It is impossible that I should dine with you to-night, gentlemen, though I thank you for your kindness. Mr. Carroll is my guest."

Young Charles looked at him with sulky admiration. He was furious with Jennings, mortally ashamed of his youth, but still appreciative of de Mailly's tact. Fairfield, seeing nothing for it but to accept his disappointment gracefully, rose, seized Jennings by the arm, waved an *au revoir* to de Mailly, and with a, "Be at the 'Blue Balls' with your beasts at ten in the morning, and we'll ride out together," drew his willing companion away to their favorite night-haunt.

De Mailly looked after them as they passed through the door, and then stood still for an instant, considering. When he turned again to young Charles, the boy's face wore a new expression.

"I'm very sorry, monsieur, if I've spoiled your night. I should have gone home without you."

Claude started forward impulsively, and drew the boy's arm through his own. "*En avant!*" he cried, gayly. "Why, Charles, I'd rather you a thousand times over than any other blood in Annapolis. 'Tis a good race, yours. Your father is as gallant a gentleman as I have met, and you are his son. Come then, Charles, we'll drink to you both, to-night, in the oldest Madeira that Mistress Vawse will sell."

At a quarter to eleven o'clock on the following morning a party of three drew rein at the portico of the Trevor house. Young Carroll's holiday was over, and, despite his words to Vincent, he was again under St. Quentin's pleasant sway. Fairfield and Jennings bore visible traces of their manner of spending the previous night; but Claude's eyes were as bright as a bird's, his hand was steady on the bridle, and his nerves had been toned for the coming trial by a sound night's sleep. A group consisting of Vincent, the four ladies of his household, Will Paca, and George Rockwell, who, to Lucy's dismay, had stopped overnight with his host, greeted the new-comers merrily from the portico. When they had dismounted, and a black had taken their horses, the whole party proceeded leisurely to the rear of the house, past the small barn, the quarters, and the tobacco-houses, to the long, narrow stables, where the many horses for work and pleasure were kept. In front of these stables was a four-acre paddock, fenced off from the general grounds, and only to be entered through a wide gate to the south. Two hundred yards behind this paddock the tobacco-fields began, and the first of them was bounded by a broad ditch full of water, to be used for irrigation in dry seasons.

As the group passed the slave-quarters, Thompson, the overseer, came towards them with the key to the stables. And while Trevor, Paca, and Claude went with him round to the stalls, the rest entered the field itself to wait. The ladies, all of them more or less curious to watch this test of de Mailly's horsemanship, stood still in the open gateway, nervous lest the horse should come too near. In the interval of waiting Rockwell was devoting himself to Lucy, who received his attentions with a coldness all but rude; young Jennings talked with Virginia and her mother, who stood a little to one side; and Fairfield seized the opportunity of conversing in a low tone with Deborah, who, dressed in yellow and blue, was as pretty as the morning itself. She stood leaning close against the fence, all ears for Sir Charles, but not turning her eyes from the closed

door of the stable, responding now and then, half absently, to the very personal remarks of her cavalier. She did not perceive a sudden, slow rustle at her side, along the very ruffle of her dress; but suddenly the lieutenant darted forward.

"Good God, Deborah!—Move—"

"What is it?" she cried, startled at his tone.

He was peering along the grass in front of them. "I'd stake my oath—'twas a water-moccasin," he muttered, half to himself.

The girl lifted her petticoats with both hands and shrank close to him. "A water-moccasin! Surely not here—" She stared nervously at the turf, but saw nothing. The snake, if there had been one, was gone.

"Nay—'t isn't there. Don't be frightened. It was a fancy," he rejoined, suspicious of his own eyes.

Deborah might have said more or retreated to Madam Trevor, but for the fact that, at this moment, the stable doors slid open and Castor, with de Mailly on his back, trotted into the field. Will Paca and Vincent followed him on foot and made their way over to the party in the gateway.

Castor, first-born of twin foals, and the one who had all the strength and beauty alike of the two, was an enormous jet-black animal, seventeen hands high, with a long, swinging step and three paces got from no blooded ancestors, but merely through one of those accidents sometimes permitted by the gods. He was an animal fiery enough of temper, and particular about his riders. Vincent Trevor, indeed, had been dubious about the Frenchman's ability even to mount him; but as Claude swung into the saddle and took the reins from the shining black neck, all doubts were forgotten. Castor turned his head, glanced at the man who sat him so easily, and neighed with satisfaction. As they trotted together into the paddock Claude rode in the French fashion, as though he were part of the horse, never rising in the saddle.

"Egad, he knows how!" observed Rockwell to Madam Trevor, as Castor came round the field towards them.

"I vow I've seen nothing so pretty," assented that lady, good-humoredly. "Eh, Lucy?"

"I much prefer the English fashion," retorted Lucy, irritably.

"How d' ye like him, Vincent?" asked his cousin, as the horse broke into a canter.

"Very well."

"The fellow knows his business, I think," observed Will Paca, dryly.

"His business!—You don't think—" Trevor raised his brows.

Paca shrugged.

"I protest, Will!" cried Charles Fairfield, warmly. "The man is a gentleman. I stake my oath on it. I've played with him, and I know."

"Oh—I ask pardon. I did not know your acquaintance was intimate," rejoined the other at once, with a proper manner, and Fairfield was satisfied. At the same time he felt a light touch on his arm, and, turning, he found Deborah looking at him with a light in her eyes.

"I'm so glad you said it," she whispered. "He is a gentleman."

But, while Fairfield carried her hand to his lips, he felt, in some way, that her speech had not brought him unmitigated pleasure.

Meantime Claude, who had lost all consciousness of an audience in his joy at being again upon the back of a fine animal, was increasing the pace of his steed. The long, light steps multiplied in number, the black hoofs flew faster yet, till the on-lookers marvelled at the ease of the tremendous speed, and Will Paca shook his head as he thought of his Doris and her rider.

"I'll give you three lengths start on the track, Will," cried Trevor, as de Mailly flew by for the fourth time, never moving a hair's-breadth in the saddle.

"Egad, he'll need it!" put in Sir Charles.

Deborah, her cheeks slightly flushed, moved to one side where she could watch without interruption. She saw



"HORSE AND RIDER HAD FLASHED OUT AT THE GATE"

Claude pass the stable and reach the far corner of the paddock. There something happened. A thing which looked, at the distance, like a black thread, shot suddenly up from the ground and struck at Castor's leg as he passed. The horse gave a quick, terrified plunge, which made de Mailly reel in the saddle, and then the animal, maddened with fear, started forward like a whirlwind. He had reared completely about and was running frantically towards the open gateway. At the beginning there had been a slight scream from Lucy, and now the men, their faces very pale, pulled the women quickly away from the opening. Deborah moved of her own accord, her eyes fixed fast on the horse, for she had seen what started its flight. In an instant horse and rider had flashed, comet-like, out at the gate, and, as they passed, Deborah knew that de Mailly had looked at her, and she had seen something very like a smile cross his set lips. Beyond the gate the horse veered again and made towards the south, in the direction of the tobacco-fields.

Claude saw, with relief, that he had an apparently unobstructed space before him. It was all that he could do now to keep himself on the horse, who no longer went at an even gait, but varied his gallop with leaps and plunges caused by pain. He was utterly beyond all control. Claude lay over on his back, both hands twisted in the long mane, his eyes half closed, breathing with some difficulty, but quite sure of himself so long as his way was clear. Suddenly, however, as he caught a glimpse of the fields beyond, his heart rose into his throat, and then sank again with a sensation which made him dizzy. A hundred yards ahead was a twenty-foot ditch of water, which no living horse could clear. If Castor saw it, and had still sense of his own, he might turn off. If not, the horse was lost, and Claude himself must take desperate chances. Many things flashed through his mind in the ensuing seconds. Most vividly of all the figure of Deborah, as he had seen her a moment before, stood out before him. Then for one more instant his mind was a white blank. They were

ten yards from the stream now, and the horse was moving straight on. Mechanically, Claude took his left foot from the stirrup and swung it over Castor's back. For one frightful instant he lay full along the animal. Then, not very much aware of what he was doing, he had let himself over the side, felt solid ground whirl under his feet, and knew that all was well with him. A moment later he vaguely heard the heavy splash and the human-like scream that told of the good animal's death. Not very long after that he was looking into Vincent's face, and, as a brandy flask was held out to him, he murmured, with as much feeling as he was capable of just then:

"Monsieur, I shall never be able to express to you my regret. I have not an idea how it occurred. Believe me—"

But Vincent was actually laughing as he replied: "My dear sir, when a poisonous snake sends its fangs into your horse's leg, its rider need offer no excuse for being run away with. And, 'pon my soul, for the sake of learning how to ride as you have done, I'd sacrifice every beast that ever was stalled on this place.—Eh, Charlie?"

And from behind came Fairfield's voice, crying heartily, "Egad, when I am released from the colonies, I'll go and live in a French training-school till I do learn!"

It was an hour later, and the excitement was over, when the Reverend George Rockwell ventured to address Will Paca on the same subject: "To tell the truth, my dear sir, I confess that I believe there must have been some truth in your suggestion in the field that our—French friend knew more than a gentleman does of horses."

Paca turned slowly about and looked at him. There was no answer made in words; but at times looks are expressive of inexpressible things.

CHAPTER V

Sambo



ACCORDING to the laws of colonial hospitality, Claude stayed all day and overnight at the Trevor house. To tell the truth, he was scarcely fit for removal, for the reaction from his nervous strain sent him, early in the afternoon, to the chamber prepared for him, from which he emerged at ten o'clock next morning with many apologies for tardiness on his tongue. He saw no one, however, to whom to deliver them. The house was deserted. Finding his way, after a search through the empty hall and parlor, into the sunny breakfast-room, he discovered there a single place set at the table, and Adam lounging in the doorway. The slave straightened and saluted him upon his entrance.

"Sit down, sah—sit down. I'll bring yo' breakfast right away."

Upon this, he darted from the house and disappeared down the path towards the kitchen, to return in two or three minutes with a large tray upon which stood a variety of smoking dishes. This he set before the guest, who proceeded to discuss them with a light appetite. While he ate he pondered, uneasily, on how he was expected to take his departure. In this matter Adam came presently to his assistance.

"Pa'don, Mas' de Mailly, but Mas' Vincent wait this mo'n till nine t' see you, den he ride out to the fields an' tell me t' say t' he be back fo' dinne' at noon; ask yo' health den."

"So I'm to stay till this afternoon?" asked Claude, in some surprise.

"Yes, sah," responded the slave, and his prompt tone settled the matter.

Claude, who had quite finished his meal, rose and strolled idly to the door which looked out upon the garden. At the far end of this, among her roses, was Madam Trevor. De Mailly did not recognize her at the distance, but he turned suddenly to the slave who was clearing the table.

"Can you tell me, Adam, where Mistress Travis will be at this hour?"

"Miss Deb? Oh, she's mos' like at de still-room." He went over to the door. "See li'l house dere cross the ya'd? She's mos' like dere."

"Thank you." Claude nodded to the man and went out of the house, around the terrace, and so through the yard towards the small building whose surrounding lilac-bushes were all in seed. Here on the step, alone and disconsolate, sat Sambo, Deborah's favorite little darky.

Sambo was very forlorn this morning. A strong appreciation of the woe of this wretched life had come to his spirit under the guise of an empty stomach. All of three hours ago Thompson, the overseer, discovered him in the climacteric moment of a glorious charge on the chickens in the runs. An entire flock of fat, white pullets were in full flight before this single son of Ethiopia, whose triumphant war-cry had unfortunately reached the quarters. Thereupon Thompson, who had no soul for the sublime, seized the conqueror by the tail of his tow-linen toga and dragged him from the field to his parental cabin, where, in the presence of Chloe, his mother, a most telling rebuke was administered. The mother's heart hardened towards the small sinner, and he had been driven outside in the very face of bacon spluttering over the fire and beans baking fragrantly in the embers. After an unhappy wandering, he at last sought the homely protection of Deborah and the still-room. Deborah, too, had left him, with the promise, however, of getting him something to eat when she returned. So here, in melancholy resignation, sat Sambo, as Claude approached.

"Can you tell me where Mistress Deborah is?" repeated de Mailly.

"She'm gone to Huckleberry Swamp," vouchsafed the stoic.

"Um—" Claude reflected. Huckleberry Swamp sounded definite, but he was unfamiliar with the country. "Where is that?" he inquired, meekly.

Sambo swept a black thumb over one shoulder, back of his head. "Dat way."

Again Claude hesitated, finally venturing the request: "Could you, perhaps, show me a little of the way?"

"You'm goin' fin' Miss Deb?"

Claude bowed.

"I'll come."

The small figure rose suddenly, descended from his dais, and put one small black fist trustfully into de Mailly's. Claude looked down into the childish face, with its round pate covered with black, woolly, hair, and a gentle light came into his eyes. He was fond of children.

The swamp appeared to be some distance away. The child's steps were short, and Claude would not hurry him. At last, however, they came upon a narrow, grassy lane, bordered on either side by a tangle of vines and bushes, at the end of which was the so-called swamp—a marsh nearly dry at this season, save for a pool in its very centre. Upon the edge of this they paused. Before them was a waste wherefrom sprang a few saplings, some young willows, a tangle of flaming tiger-lilies, and a host of those plants which grow in damp places. Claude saw no sign of a human being, but Sambo presently sprang forward.

"Deh she is!" he cried, running into the brush. Claude followed rapidly, coming at last in sight of her whom he sought.

Deborah knelt upon the damp ground, bending over a plant which she was minutely examining. Claude had seen it and its flower often enough, he thought. The stem was perhaps three feet high, with long, narrow, spotted leaves, and clusters of small purplish flowers. These

were what Deborah was studying, and on her flushed face was an expression which Claude had not beheld before. Startled by Sambo's appearance, she looked up.

"Oh, good-morning!" she said, rising, and extending her hand.

"One finds you in curious places," he observed, bending over it.

"It is my work. Has Dr. Carroll come this morning?"

"He had not when I left the house."

"He will, though, I think. Are we to go back now?"

"Not until you are quite ready, mademoiselle."

"I'm ready. I must take this with me." From a little bag hanging at her side she drew a small pruning-knife and two pieces of cotton cloth. Having cut the stem of the plant before her, she wrapped about it one square of the cloth and took it up in her left hand.

"Permit me to carry it for you."

"Hold it, then, where the cloth is."

"Why? Surely it is not unsafe to touch?" He looked at her curiously.

"I don't know. Some things are. This is a spotted-hemlock. I fancied it a water plant, but 'tis another variety. I will test it to-day, if the doctor doesn't come. Oh! Here is something more to take home." Down in the soil at their feet grew two large fungi, which bore a slight resemblance to table mushrooms, but were far more beautiful than they. The umbrella-shaped cups were of a brilliant scarlet color, fading inwards, in gracefully curving lines, to a pale centre. A faint acrid odor emanated from them as Deborah knelt and cut them deftly at the ground's edge. Taking them up in her cloth, she held them a little away from her face.

"What's dose, Miss Deb?" inquired Sambo, eying them admiringly.

"A sort of mushroom, Sambo. Oh, a most excellent dinner dish they'd make!" she added, laughing.

And hungry Sambo heard her. Were these pretty things good to eat? He had seen not a few of them in the grass

about the roads and fields. Here was a breakfast ready for him. He considered a little, the idea of cooking not entering his head. Neither Deborah nor de Mailly knew when he ceased to follow them, it merely occurring to them by the time they reached home that Sambo had not been with them for some time. Claude, who had found the way long in coming, deemed it only too short on the return. And Deborah, demurely realizing that she was perfectly happy, continued to talk to him in that tranquil manner which, from its apparent indifference and self-possession, seemed such an anomaly, considering her youth.

"May I ask the use of this?" asked de Mailly, curiously, holding out the spray of spotted-hemlock.

"I don't know its use. 'Tis what I am going to try to find out if the doctor does not come this morning. I am ignorant if it is as poisonous as water-hemlock. I will try to learn."

Claude bit his lip. "And if the doctor does come?"

"It will be most interesting. We are to try the effect of two alkaloids in one system, and I must note the different symptoms, the combined result, and the complications which ensue from the interaction."

"You give these—poisons—to some beast. Is it not so?"

Deborah hesitated for a little, finally replying, quietly, "A cat."

"And he will no doubt die?"

"No—perhaps not. That is our hope, monsieur. If we could discover one thing which might counterbalance the effect of another, can you not see that it might some time serve to save men's lives? It is unbecoming in me to speak of it, but did you not know that the liquid given you as medicine for your fever I distilled from the plant called monkshood? And did not that medicine help to restore you to health? And yet, sir, it was a virulent poison, ten drops of which would kill an animal."

De Mailly looked at the girl in surprise. She was certainly unlike any woman that he had ever met. "Forgive me," he said, earnestly. "I did not understand you.

I do admire and respect this work of yours. My gratitude—how shall I express it? There is, indeed, little that one can say to the preserver of his life—”

“Please, don’t!” she cried, impulsively, and then stopped. He was regarding her so earnestly, and his look said so much more than his tongue had ever done, that she found no words at her command. So they fell into silence as once more they approached the house.

Dr. Carroll, returning on the day before from his shooting, and, wearied by the dulness of Annapolis in mid-summer, kept his promise and came out to see Deborah. He found her, ignorant of his arrival, preparing her retort for the distillation of the water-hemlock, while Claude, willingly pressed into service, had gone to the kitchen to obtain a lighted coal for the tripod of charcoal. An addition to the equipment of the room had recently been made. Beside the cupboard in the corner stood a good-sized cage, its top and bottom made of pine boards held together by narrow wooden slats nailed upon all four sides. Within this prison of the condemned sat a half-grown tortoise-shell tabby, presented yesterday to the establishment by Sambo. As Deborah took up her hemlock and with careful hands began to strip away its leaves and blossoms, she glanced now and then at her prisoner with an expression half of pity and half of speculative interest. The animal looked very comfortable on its bed of grass, its toilet just completed, with slow eyes blinking at the light; never a suspicion in its head of a possible swift death at the hands of the slender girl at the table yonder. The stillness was interrupted by the entrance of the doctor.

“Good-morning to you, Mistress Debby! At work, eh? Oho! Water-hemlock!”

“No. This is *Maculatum*. See the leaves—spotted. Is this as poisonous as the other, do you think?”

The doctor chuckled. “Thou’rt a born botanist, Debby. This poisonous? ’Tis historic. Socrates died by it. ’Tis as well obtained by crushing in alcohol, though.

Did you bring the root? Now that was carelessness. The root is most virulent—delightfully virulent. You should be sent back to get it, only that I am not here to distil this morning.—Ah, Monsieur Claude! Good-day! Are you turned neophyte?”

Claude, with a shovelful of embers, had halted in the doorway. At Carroll's question he smiled and came forward. “I should be glad if I might stay and look on. I am woefully ignorant in these matters.”

Deborah took the shovel from his hands, emptying its contents carefully into the tripod. “Thank you. Be seated, if you care to watch us.”

“By all means, sit yonder, de Mailly, and look on. Miss Travis is preparing some *Conium maculatum* for distillation, though she will get a poor result from the mere leaves and flowers. And behold in me, monsieur, the conscienceless wretch about to destroy life in that hapless pussy, for the mere gratification of criminal instinct.—What's this, Deborah?”

The doctor's change of tone was so sudden and so marked that the girl turned quickly about to behold him standing over the fungi which she had placed at the far end of the table.

“That? Madam uses it sometimes for fly-poison. I purposed inquiring of you if the alkaloid could be extracted.”

Carroll shook his head gravely. “It doesn't need extraction. The whole thing is replete with poison. 'Tis *amanita muscaria*, the deadliest of all fungi. Have you seen the symptoms?”

Deborah shook her head.

“Then you shall. I mind me I had a case of them many years ago—a family ate them at supper. All four died.* There was no help that I or any one else had to give. Such agony I have never seen. The effect is not apparent for from four to nine hours after eating, though internal dis-

* This case is taken from a medical journal of 1877.

semination of the poison must begin at once. After the case I mentioned, I experimented a good deal with them. Time does not seem to affect their power. After four months' keeping I knew one of them to cause death to a dog in ten hours. Would you care to try this to-day on your cat there, Deborah, in conjunction with one of the liquids?"

Deborah did not reply at once, and Claude hoped that she would decline the proposition. Her answer was a question: "Will you stay, doctor, till the fungus acts? I couldn't distinguish the different symptoms alone."

The doctor reflected. "'Tis eleven now. By four the thing should be under way. I'll get home by six. Yes, I'll stay."

"Then let us give it at once."

"Very well. What will you combine with it?"

Deborah went to the cupboard and surveyed her array of phials. Finally, selecting one filled with a clear, white liquid, with less sediment at the bottom than most of her mixtures contained, she brought it over to Dr. Carroll.

"What is it?" he asked.

"It is from nightshade. I made it a week ago."

"Atropine. Symptoms? Can you give them?"

Claude looked at her closely as she made reply:

"I gave forty drops to a cat. It seemed to be quiet for about three-quarters of an hour. Then it tried to mew, but that was hard for it. The muscles of its throat were strained. After a little it began to bite at things in the cage. Its eyes were large, and the pupils full, as if it were in the dark. It drank all I would give it, but could not swallow easily. Then there came spasms. Finally it fell asleep, and died three hours after the dose."

The doctor nodded with satisfaction, but Deborah, glancing at de Mailly from beneath her lids, saw him look at her in strong displeasure. Instantly she flushed and her head straightened defiantly back.

"Monsieur, I do not think that you will enjoy our experiments here this morning. Will you be so obliging

as to join my cousins, Virginia and Lucy, in some pleasanter occupation?"

There was a note of piqued command in the tone which Claude, who knew women well, would have disobeyed in any other case. Now, however, he made no reply, but rose in grave silence, bowed to her, and left the room.

"On my life, that was not a gallant thing," observed Carroll, placidly, when their sensitive guest had crossed the yard.

Deborah made no answer. She was more deeply hurt than she would have believed possible, and she did not choose that her voice should betray her. Crossing again to the cupboard, she took from its lowest shelf a deep-bowled horn spoon, with which she knelt before the cat's cage. In the mean time the doctor had been occupied in cutting the fungus into small cubes. These, together with the atropine, he took over to his pupil, who was now on the floor with the cat in her lap. She took the *amanita* quietly from her companion's hands, placed one piece in the creature's mouth, and manipulated its throat till it swallowed convulsively.

"How much should it have?" she inquired, grimly.

"About six pieces to a spoonful of this," returned her mentor, holding up the atropine.

Unflinchingly Deborah finished her task, and then, hastily replacing the prisoner in its cage, she fastened the little door. Carroll, who had looked on without comment, helped her to rise from the floor, and silently noted the fact that her hands were very cold.

"Come now to the house and rest," he said, with quiet persuasion.

She looked a little surprised. "Surely not. I will stay here and watch. Besides, there is the hemlock;" she nodded towards the little heap of flowers and leaves by the retort. "I will distil that. The fire is ready."

"No, Debby. You're tired. Hark you, the poisons will certainly not show for half an hour, if they do then. It is probable that the *muscaria* will retard the action of the

atropine for a much longer time. Then you must have your full wits about you, for 'twill be the most interesting thing we've done. Come now, as your physician, I insist."

But though Charles Carroll's will was strong, that of Deborah Travis was stronger. He tried persuasion, command, and entreaty, finally becoming angry, and so losing the battle; for, having called her a stubborn hussy, there was nothing for it but to march off alone to the house. The girl saw him go with a sore heart, and then, doggedly determined, returned to her work, the pleasure of it gone for the first time in her life. When, after a while, Sambo strolled thoughtfully in from the fields, she greeted him with positive delight.

The little boy seated himself, Turk-fashion, beside the tripod, to watch the water just beginning to bubble in the body of the retort. It was an occupation which he dearly loved, and in the observation of which he was a privileged mortal, for Deborah allowed but few in her work-room. During the process of distillation she was regarded by Sambo as some one who had risen for the time to supernatural heights. She was quite a different person from the Miss Deb whom he knew ordinarily out-of-doors. On every occasion, however, he had been wont to talk unceasingly either to her or to himself when in her company. To-day she wondered at his silence. His interest in the action of the retort was as great as ever, but every effort to draw him into conversation failed. So, after a time, Deborah, her closest attention demanded by the approaching end of the distillation, when the purest alkaloid would come from her plant, ceased also to speak, and, indeed, almost forgot his presence. The liquid had been filtered, bottled, and set aside for its second vaporizing, when she suddenly recollected that in the morning she had promised to get something for the little negro to eat. It was sufficient cause for his silence.

"Oh, Sambo! Indeed I'm sorry! How hungry you must be! Come, I'll make Chloe give you some of our dinner to-day."

Sambo's big eyes opened wide and he slowly shook his head. "Had somf'n, Miss Debby. D' wan' no mo'."

With his words came the sound of the dinner-horn from the quarters. He turned. "Goin' home," he said, wearily, trudging out of the room; while the girl, wondering who had fed him, proceeded to restore order in her immaculate little domain. When she had finished the doctor reappeared.

"Madam Trevor despatched me," he explained. "Dinner is ready. You're tired, Debby. Come in."

"Yes, sir, at once, when this sleeve is down." She pulled at the short elbow-sleeve which she had pushed to the shoulder to be rid of its ruffles.

"How's the cat?" asked Carroll, walking over to its cage.

The creature lay upon the bed of grass blinking nonchalantly, after a luncheon of milk.

"Perfectly well, eh? Note, Deborah, that the action of the atropine is already retarded half an hour beyond its time. Most interesting, on my word!"

"When do you think it will begin?"

"That is difficult to say. By two or three o'clock at the outside. Then death will probably be rapid. Ready now? Madam is a little impatient, but she'll not show it before de Mailly. There—the horn sounds at last."

Dinner was gone through with tediously, and at three o'clock the entire family, with the guests, sat upon the portico, drowsy with heat and the effort of talking. The doctor, perceiving Deborah's growing impatience, was about to dare Madam Trevor's high displeasure by carrying her off to the still-room to watch their cat, when suddenly around the corner of the east wing dashed a negro, hysterical with fear.

"Blessed Ma'y be praised! Docto' Ca'l, come quick! Sambo's dyin'! Gib him somf'n fo' he go off, fo' Christ's sake!"

Before the last words were spoken the doctor had jumped from the porch, and the rest of the party rose anxiously.

"Sambo? Sambo dying, Joe? Surely not! I'll come at once."

"Which cabin, man? Show us the way," commanded Carroll, energetically.

Madam Trevor had run into the house to get an apron for her gown, and Deborah, seizing the opportunity, flew across the portico, leaped down on the east side, and caught up with the doctor.

"I shall come, too," she said. And Carroll's silence gave consent.

The cabin in which Sambo and his parents lived was on the northeastern corner of the quarters, and, as the doctor, with his conductor and Deborah, approached it, a group of negro women about its door hailed them with expressions of relief and praise. Not heeding the pious ejaculations, the three passed into the tiny hut, where, upon the mattress in a corner, covered with tattered blankets, lay Sambo. Beside him, her apron over her head, sat the mother, Chloe, rocking to and fro in absolute terror.

Carroll knelt at once beside the mattress and glanced sharply into the child's face. Sambo was lying deathly still, breathing heavily, his eyes wide open, his black skin dripping with sweat. The doctor felt the child's pulse, opened his mouth, and gave a sharp exclamation as he perceived the tongue to be heavily coated with a thick, grayish matter.

"Sit here, Deborah, and hold his hands. He'll not be quiet long."

Deborah took her place at the child's head and clasped the little burning hands in her own, while Carroll, in a low voice, began to question Chloe. Sambo noticed Deborah, and smiled faintly as she leaned over him. In a moment more a swift spasm of agony passed over the small features, and he uttered a guttural cry of pain. Carroll ran to his side, while the colored woman, wringing her hands, sank helplessly on the floor. The paroxysm was violent. The child's body twisted and writhed. He rolled over and over upon the bed, moaning like an animal,

or shrieking in a delirium of torture. Deborah, very pale, and Carroll, silent and stern, held him so as to prevent as much exhaustion of strength as was possible. When he began to grow more quiet, Madam Trevor came in, looking angrily at her cousin, who, however, scarcely saw her.

"It is possible that you do not need me, doctor," she said, in her most offended tone.

Carroll paid small attention to her manner. "If you will send out some old linen, pepper, mustard, and salt from the house, it will be all that we can use. To be frank," he added, in a low tone, "there is little hope now."

Madam Trevor looked aghast, and her manner softened instantly. "Little hope! What do you mean? What shall we do?"

"What I ask, if you please. Linen, salt, mustard, and pepper. Chloe, you must heat some water in the kettle there." And Carroll turned about again as Madam Trevor, without another word, hurried out of the cabin on her errand.

The girl, meantime, bent over Sambo, questioning him.

"What was it, Sambo? Have you eaten anything? What have you done?" she asked, caressingly.

Sambo, panting from weakness, answered, just audibly: "Done eat nuf'n 't all but mushrooms you picked 's mo'n wiv Mas' Frenchman. You say dey good fo' dinne'."

"My God!"

"What is it?" asked the doctor, quickly, seeing her face grow gray.

"He has eaten the *muscaria*," she whispered, tremulously.

"I know it."

"And it was my fault—my fault! Good Heavens! What shall I do?"

With a quick sob she caught the child, who suddenly sprang to her in a new spasm of pain. The muscles of his body grew rigid with contraction beneath her grasp. Sambo clutched and opened his hands wildly in the air. New sweat poured out upon his cold flesh, his eyes started from

their sockets, and Chloe, catching sight of him, screamed with despair. At this moment Madam Trevor, bearing those things which the doctor had commanded, re-entered the cabin. While Carroll worked over Sambo's body, Deborah suddenly left her place, turned blindly about and ran out of the cabin through the terror-stricken group at the door, and across the sunny yard to the still-room. Without an instant's hesitation she flung herself against the closed door and turned its handle with her shaking fingers. Presently she found herself standing dizzily before the cage of the poisoned animal. Twice she opened and shut her eyes to make sure that her vision was not deranged. No. There was the cat making its afternoon toilet with foppish precision, stopping occasionally to regard her solemnly with its bright green eyes.

Deborah was not long there. When she was sure her hope had been realized, she turned to the cupboard, snatched a bottle from its shelf, and ran at full speed out of the room and back towards the cabin. Upon the bed Sambo's body lay now outstretched, quiet save for an occasional little quiver of the muscles, and over it Madam Trevor, with grave tenderness, and Dr. Carroll, with hopeless skill, worked. Some hot gin had been forced down the child's throat, and across him were spread linen cloths soaked in water so near to boiling that they had scalded Chloe's hands; yet Sambo paid no attention either to them or to the mixture with which they were rubbing his limbs. When Deborah returned, Carroll left off chafing the little black arms and went to her where she stood by the door.

"What to do, Debby?" he whispered, helplessly.

"There's no hope?" she asked.

Carroll shook his head. "He is passing into the coma now. That is the end."

"You will let me try something?" she asked, quickly.

"Anything in the world. Nothing can harm him now."

"Where is a cup?"

"What have you?" he cried.

Madam Trevor started and looked around. Deborah put

a tremulous finger to her lips, and shook her head. The doctor instantly understood, and let her go to the shelf in a corner, where, her back being to the others, she poured half the contents of her bottle into a tin cup. With this, slowly and resolutely, she approached the bed. Chloe stepped suddenly in her way:

"What yo' got?" she asked, in no friendly tone.

"Medicine for Sambo," was the steady reply.

"Of your own making, Deborah?" came Madam Trevor's sharp voice.

"Yes, yes. You are wasting precious time. Chloe—let me pass."

"No, Miss Deb'. You ain' goin' give Sambo nuf'n from still-house."

"Dr. Carroll!" There was a desperate appeal in her tone, and the man came instantly to her aid.

"Listen, Chloe! Unless your child in some way gets the help that I cannot give, he must die. He is poisoned, as I supposed, fatally. Miss Deborah believes that she can save his life. You cannot let him die without the attempt."

The colored woman paid no attention to the words, and still menacingly barred the way. A new idea was taking possession of her: that Deborah had poisoned the boy. Carroll, who was watching her narrowly, saw the sudden squaring of her shoulders, darted quickly in front of her and seized her about the body just as she had been about to fling herself upon the girl. Deborah, keyed to the highest pitch, watched her opportunity, slipped like a cat around to the bedside, raised Sambo's head upon her arm, and, to Madam Trevor's terror, pressed her fingers on the child's throat, and forced him to swallow the contents of the cup. At once he was seized with a violent coughing fit. Deborah lifted him upright at once, pressed her hands upon his temples and the back of his neck, and kept him from that retching which would have been fatal to her experiment.

Meantime Carroll had forced Chloe, screaming and

struggling, from the cabin, and, after calling Thompson to keep order in the group outside, he closed and barred the door. Madam Trevor then rose from her place.

"Charles Carroll, you are permitting my ward to murder this child. I cannot remain here as witness to such a deed. When you will accept the assistance that I have to give, and will order this girl away, you may send word to the house."

And, with these words, Antoinette Trevor rose in strong anger, shook out her flounces, unfastened the door for herself, and, without more ado, left the cabin and the dying child alone to the care of the doctor and his mad protégée.

Carroll witnessed the departure without a word, and it was with an expression rather of relief than chagrin that he turned to Deborah.

"What did you give him?" he asked, quietly.

"Atropine. Four times more than enough to kill him."*

"The cat—"

"Lives."

"Good God, Deborah! We must save him now!"

Deborah set her teeth. "We—I will save him," she said, with slow precision. "Or else—they will bury me with him."

Madam Trevor, upon her return to the house, said not a word of the scene in the cabin. It was a relief to her to find that de Mailly had tactfully departed and that the family was alone. Lucy and Virginia beset her with questions, for the child was a pet with them all. It was something of a shock, then, when their mother turned upon them, saying sharply: "Sambo will die," and forthwith retired to her own room. The girls looked at each other for a long moment in amazement, and then Lucy cried quickly:

* Atropine is to-day considered the best antidote for cases of poisoning by the *amanita muscaria* or the *amanita phalloides*. At the period of the story (1744) its efficacy was unknown.

"Let us go to see him at once."

Virginia would have assented, but her brother shook his head.

"Deborah and the doctor both are there. If you are needed, you will be sent for. Otherwise I forbid you to go."

And so the Trevor family lived dismally through the afternoon, waiting for the supper-hour, when the watchers would appear. But Adam blew the horn in vain. No word came from the cabin, and Madam Trevor, burning with curiosity and anxiety, flatly refused to send any one to ask news of the child.

The sun set, and dusk deepened to evening. Candles were lighted in the sitting-room, but Vincent alone made any pretence of reading. The three women moved about restlessly, the girls not daring, and their mother unwilling to speak on the subject which occupied all their thoughts. The silence had become unbearable, and Vincent at last started to put away his book, with a resolve to go to the quarters, when the door flew open and Dr. Carroll strode into the room, carrying Deborah's body in his arms. He laid her down upon the brocaded sofa, while the girls rushed to her side.

"She fainted as we came across the yard," explained the doctor, wearily.

"The child is dead, then?"

"Sambo will live. The girl saved his life. She is a genius, madam; and—for God's sake, get me a glass of wine!"

CHAPTER VI

Claude's Memories



EBORAH recovered from her afternoon over Sambo's sick-bed far less rapidly than the small negro did from the effects of his remarkable breakfast. In fact, three days after that upon which he had substituted the fly agaric for hoe-cake, he was running about the plantation as usual, only with a new and useful working knowledge concerning vermilion-colored fungi. With beautiful impartiality he sought the still-room on the afternoon of the first day that he left the cabin. He found its door locked, and presently discovered that Miss Deb was to be seen nowhere about the grounds. On making peremptory inquiries, he was informed, much to his disgust, that his play-fellow was ill in bed, without *amanita* for cause, and that he might not dream of such a thing as seeing her. Thereupon, retiring to the still-house door-step, young Sambo lifted up his voice and wept, though he got no consolation from the process.

Strictly speaking, Deborah was not in bed. She was too restless to remain long in any one place, but she felt no desire to leave the house. What care she needed, and a little more, was lavished on her by Madam Trevor, her cousins, and the slaves. Nevertheless, she was very wretched. She could not understand her continual weariness and her impatience with the familiar scenes of everyday life. She suffered inexpressibly with the mid-day heat, and shivered with cold through the mild nights. "Nerves" were to her unnecessary and incomprehensible things, and her disgust with herself was none the less exasperat-

ing because it was unreasonable. Dr. Carroll, however, was wiser than she. A week after Sambo's affair he heard of her condition and went out to her at once. His prescription pleased the whole family, with the exception, perhaps, of Sir Charles. He proposed taking her back with him to Annapolis, to spend ten days under his own hospitable roof, with his two sisters to take care of her, and young Charles for company. Permission for the visit was granted on the asking, and, upon the next afternoon, Deborah set out in the family coach, with the doctor on horseback as outrider. The only regret that she felt on leaving was, oddly enough, the parting from Sir Charles. His attentions to her during the past week had been remarkably delicate. Madam Trevor herself could hardly have objected to them. Through long hours he had sat near her while she lay upon a sofa, generally with Lucy or Virginia, or both, beside her, recounting little stories of his own or his comrades' adventures; describing London and London life; stopping when he saw that his voice tired her; fanning her, perhaps, in silence; arranging the tray that held her meals on the stand beside her; and only once in a long, long time looking into her wandering eyes with an expression that would set her to thinking of grave and far-off things. Thus she left the plantation, feeling a new and not unpleasant regret at losing the companionship which had almost made her illness worth the having.

Dr. Carroll's sisters, Mistress Lettice and little Frances Appleby, awaited their guest with solicitation. The coach that held her arrived at their door just at tea-time, and Deborah was smiling with pleasure when the doctor lifted her out and carried her bodily up the walk and into the house, with St. Quentin on one side, his son on the other, and the little old maids smiling together in the doorway. The young lady then refused absolutely to retire, but sat up to tea, partook of some of Miriam Vawse's raspberry conserve, and afterwards lay upon the sofa in the parlor with an unexpressed hope in her heart that Claude might come.

Claude was to have come. Mistress Lettice, when she learned from her brother that their guest would arrive that afternoon, had sent down a polite request by young Charles that monsieur would honor them with his presence in the evening. As politely de Mailly returned thanks for the invitation, gave no definite reply, but intended to go. Upon that afternoon, however, the *Sea-Gull* arrived, after a fair voyage, from Portsmouth; and in her came a long letter and a consignment of rents from Mailly-Nesle to his cousin. Many things were happening in France. In March, war with England and Maria Theresa had been declared, and the French armies prepared for a campaign. In May came the astounding intelligence that, through the influence of la Châteauroux, who loved the heroic, Louis would command his forces in person. A week later it was understood that the favorite was to follow in the royal train, together with the King's staff, his aides, his chefs, his valet, and the impedimenta. The letter was dated May 28th. As he read it, Claude's heart burned; and with the evening, in the bitterness of his memories of the old life, and in the wretched conjectures that he made as to what was the French news now, he forgot Deborah. Where was she, Marie Anne, his cousin? What battles had been fought over the water? Was the fifteenth Louis still reigning over France? Had not some chance shot struck him, and with him the third daughter of the de Maillys, down in all their clanging glory? Did la Châteauroux never now think of the cousin exiled for her, at her instance? Henri did not say. And Miriam Vawse of the Annapolis inn wondered that night what news her lodger had received, that he should sit, stoop-shouldered, over the empty fireplace, and forget that, only two blocks away, in Dr. Carroll's house, Debby Travis was vainly waiting for him to come to her.

Claude did remember her next morning, when the sunlight gave matters a different aspect, and the letter had been shut away in his trunk. So it was with only half his mind on French battle-fields and a vaguely dreamed-

of Dettingen, that he ate his colonial breakfast; and afterwards, as he left the ordinary and bent his steps leisurely northward towards Dr. Carroll's house, his homesickness fled quite away.

The Carrolls' breakfast had ended some time ago (Claude's Versailles habits of late rising were not yet broken); and Deborah, already bettered by the change of scene and atmosphere, had come down to the morning meal. She was now in the doctor's study, leaning back in his great chair, while young Charles stood moodily facing the window, sulky because she was not yet well enough to bear a morning on the bay, so obtaining for him a vacation on plea of hospitality.

"Now I know why you won't mind about me any more. Here's your de Mailly coming up the walk. Faith, I'll not bear it! You've grown into a fine lady, Debby, and are no fun nowadays. I'd as soon have Lucy running with me."

"And you, Charles, are ungentlemanly. If you were anything but a child, I wouldn't speak to you this sen-
night."

"I'm as old as you, lacking a month."

"Little one would think it, then."

"Pardon, if I intrude. I come to inquire after Mistress Travis' health."

Claude stood smiling upon the threshold, for he had overheard the last words of the quarrel. Deborah, her white face flushing a little, held out her hand. As he bent over it she said, in a much gentler tone than that which she had been using: "I am really well, only I have nerves. Charles, however, is using me very ill. He says that nerves are nonsense. Do you think so?"

"In my country, mademoiselle, they are considered serious. A lady who has them retires to her bed and expects all her friends to come and amuse her till she is better. Charles, you are heartless."

Deborah looked a little shocked at his first statement and his matter-of-fact tone when making it; but she said

nothing. Presently Father St. Quentin appeared at the door. After stopping to extend a hearty greeting to de Mailly, he flung a Latin imperative at poor Charles, who obeyed it with the poorest possible grace, leaving the room alone to Deborah and the Count. Claude seated himself near her, and looked at her for a few seconds in silence, noting a difference in her general expression. She was too languid to be embarrassed by the pause, but, not caring to return the scrutiny, slightly turned her head and looked toward the windows.

"I owe Miss Travis an apology, do I not?"

She glanced towards him now in some surprise. "An apology? For what?"

"Nay, then I will not make it. I will only tell you that, as the preserver of a child's life, I must reverence your talent, on which, I confess, I had looked with ill-timed disapproval."

Deborah gazed at him thoughtfully. "I recollect now. You were displeased to think that I would poison a cat. I assure you it was the cat saved Sambo's life. Neither of them died."

"So Dr. Carroll told me. I have heard all that you did on that afternoon; and I, like the doctor, have not words to express my admiration."

"You are very kind. Please—do not let us talk of that. I came here to forget. Come—would you entertain me, monsieur?"

"In whatever way lies in my power."

"Why, then, it is done. It would give me infinite entertainment, monsieur, to hear the life of the ladies of the French Court, where you lived. The doctor has told me what a great Court it is. How do the ladies dress, what do they eat, do they go every night to the assembly? Faith, that would be tiresome enough, I think!"

De Mailly laughed a little at her comment, but did not immediately comply with the request. Memory had once more come home to him again, but this time with a curious addition. Of a sudden he found that he could

definitely imagine Deborah Travis as having a place in that French Court that she spoke of. It was a curious notion, and he regarded her for some time contemplatively, before he began to speak.

"If you were in Versailles, Mademoiselle Deborah, you would doubtless be madame."

"What! Are there no unmarried ladies there?"

"Yes—a few. Those who cannot find a husband. But we are supposing that you would not be there unless some grand seigneur had married you and carried you away."

Deborah laughed merrily, and Claude, with some satisfaction, perceived that she had entered into his own spirit. "Continue! continue!" she cried. "I am already perishing with interest."

"You would dwell in an apartment in—we will say the Rue des Rossignols—that is the name of a street. Let us see. You sleep in a charming room hung in white brocade. Your dressing-room will be in pink satin, with the chairs in tapestry which monsieur would have embroidered for you—"

"Monsieur—a man—embroider!"

"Oh yes. The King himself commanded de Gêvres to teach him stitches a year ago. He began four *sièges* at once, I remember, and de Mouhy made an excellent *bon-mot* about it. No matter. Your tapestries in apple-green, your tables in mahogany, and your sets in ivory—or gold? Which?"

"Ivory, I think. Pink satin and ivory would be—oh, most beautiful!" she replied, cocking her head a little on one side.

He nodded, appreciative of her taste. "The salon—blue and gold; the dining-room in green; and, for monsieur's room, we will let it go. At nine in the morning you have your chocolate in bed. Half an hour later you rise, and your toilette *à la mode* begins."

"Oh, what is a toilette *à la mode*?"

The Count shrugged his shoulders. "You, in a delightful *négligé*, receive in the pink satin boudoir, while your

hair is powdered. Yours would never need to be curled, mademoiselle. *Eh bien!* During the toilette you would have cakes and cordial, or more chocolate. At one o'clock you meet monsieur the husband, and dine with him either alone or at the palace. For the afternoon there are a thousand things. You attend a levée, the hunt, a salon, a tea à l'anglaise; you drive, promenade in the Orangerie or a Paris boulevard; you visit shops; you attend a sale; you receive at home; or, perhaps, if the night is to be fatiguing, you sleep. You never spin, you do not knit, nor do you—distil poisons and save lives, Mistress Deborah. At seven you sup—hardly this time with monsieur, who has his own engagements. Later you attend the Opéra or the Italiens, indulge in a little supper with a party later, and return to Versailles shortly after midnight. If you are in his Majesty's immediate circle you go to Choisy, perhaps. But—that, mademoiselle—I trust—you will never do. Now do you think the life pleasant?"

"I'm sure I cannot tell," was the demure response; but the girl's face belied her words. It was aglow with pleasure. "And what is it that *you* would do, monsieur? How—how could you have borne it to leave such a life? Did you really tire of it? Was—"

He rose sharply to his feet, and she broke off at once, astonished and half frightened at the change in his face. "There are many thorns among the roses, mademoiselle. Life is not happier there than here. And some day—some day, perhaps—I will tell you the other side of it; why"—he almost whispered now, for his throat was dry—"why I left it all."

"Oh, forgive me! I had not meant to pain you."

He looked down into the face that had lost all its glow of pleasure, took her slight hand, kissed it quietly, and left her alone to think over all that had been said, to wonder over the uncertain promise of more, and to hope that he would neither forget nor repent.

The little conversation had taken her mind away from herself and set it in a new and far-off channel. When Dr.

Carroll came back from his walk to the wharves, he found his little guest with color in her face and animation in her air. She told him of de Mailly's visit, and Carroll, judging its effect, resolved that the tonic should be administered often while his patient remained with him. The result was that, in the following days, Claude de Mailly and Deborah were thrown constantly together. And during their lively conversations, or, perhaps, even more so in their desultory ones, there grew up between them an intimacy more of good-fellowship than anything else, the spirit of which deceived both Claude and the doctor, though how much prophecy Deborah might have made concerning it, would be more difficult to say.

One afternoon, a Friday, and two days before Deborah was to return to the plantation, while the doctor was at his counting-house near the wharves, and the two little sisters sat together spinning in the sitting-room, their guest, panting with the heat inside the house, and wishing also to escape young Charles, who would presently be relieved from his *Horace*, sought out her largest hat and crept out of doors, passing down the street in the direction of the Vawse inn. She had not seen de Mailly for nearly twenty-four hours, and, as a consequence, her day was empty. She had small hopes of encountering him now, but was too restless to remain any longer in the room with the two old maids and their whirring wheels. She passed the quaintly gabled tavern, whose door, contrary to custom, was closed. Evidently Miriam was out. There was no sign of life about the windows. Claude himself was probably not there. Deborah walked on, disappointedly, as far as the court-house, and, still not wishing to admit to herself that she had come out simply with the hope of encountering de Mailly, turned down Green Street and followed it to the water's edge. The Stewart quay was deserted, and she halted there to look over the smooth, warm stretch of water. It was very still. The idle swash of the ripples against the pier was the only sound that reached her ears. The atmosphere was hazy with heat. It seemed

as though it was the very weight and thickness of the air which gradually formed a solid arch of purple storm-clouds above the river to the west. Presently the sun was obscured. Still Deborah stood, heedlessly watching the bay, and breathing slowly in the stifling heat. Suddenly some one appeared beside her.

"Mademoiselle—mademoiselle—you will surely be wet."

Deborah turned her head towards him with a smile of pleasure which she would have repressed if she could. "Did you fall from the clouds, sir?"

"No. I have myself been wandering by the water this afternoon; and for the past quarter of an hour I have been watching the gathering storm—and you. Come, mademoiselle, we must seek shelter—and quickly."

"Let us try to reach Miriam's. We can run."

He took her arm as she spoke, and they started together down Hanover Street to Charles, which ran straight up for five blocks to Gloucester Street and the Vawse tavern. As they passed the Reynolds ordinary a deafening clap of thunder broke over them. Deborah shivered, and de Mailly put an arm about her to help her faster on their way. The street was empty. The heat had not yet broken, and beads of perspiration stood on their faces as they went. A long hiss of lightning glided like a snake through the storm-cloud. The town was almost dark. Deborah had begun to pant, and her companion could feel the beating of her heart shake her whole frame.

"C'est rien, mademoiselle. Nous sommes presque là. L'orage sera vraiment énorme!" he muttered rapidly.

A moment more and, as a new thunder-clap rattled down the sky, a sudden cold breath struck the city. With the wind, which blew like a hurricane down the river, came a pelting rain. The two reached their destination barely in time. Claude flung open the door of the tavern, and Deborah was blown over its threshold in a gush of water.

It was with some difficulty that Claude shut and bolted the door in the face of the wind. When he turned about his companion lay back on a wooden settle in a state of

exhaustion. While the gale howled without and the thunder crashed down the heavens, he lit a candle with his tinder-box, brought a glass of strong waters for Deborah, and helped her gently to a more comfortable chair. He took the hat from her tumbled hair, chafed her hands till her nails grew pink again, and then stood back regarding her anxiously.

"Oh, I'm quite recovered. It was a long run. Where—where is Miriam?"

"Mistress Vawse? John Squire's boy broke a limb falling from a roof, and she has gone to attend the—what do you say?—setting of it."

"Then we are here quite alone?" asked the girl, nervously.

"Surely Miss Travis is not afraid with me?" Claude looked at her in hurt surprise. "I will retire at once to my room. When the rain ceases—"

Deborah laughed a little. "No, no. You misunderstand. I am afraid of storms. I should be frightened to death to be left here alone with—that."

Both listened as the long, low growl of thunder rolled down the sky and died away. It was growing darker again. A new storm was rising.

Claude, much relieved at the sincerity of Deborah's tone, drew a stool near her. "May I sit here by you, then?" he asked.

Deborah nodded and leaned back in her own chair. Then there fell a little silence on the room. The girl's unconscious eyes travelled over de Mailly's face as he sat regarding the rain-splashed windows; and they found a new expression, a new paleness, an unusual soberness, upon the clear-cut features. Unthinkingly, Deborah spoke:

"You are changed to-day, monsieur. I have not seen you so before. Why are you melancholy?"

He turned towards her quickly. "Yes, I have what we call *les papillons noirs* to-day. In some way, Mistress Deborah, 'tis your fault. In these last days I have

said so much to you of my former life, jestingly perhaps, and yet feeling it, that to-day it has brought me home-sickness."

Before his frank look Deborah's eyelids drooped, and presently, with a little hesitation, she said: "You once told me that some day you would relate to me why it was that you left your home. Could you not—now?"

"Ah, no!" The exclamation was impetuous. "It is not a story for you, mademoiselle. An older woman might hear—but to you—"

"Think of me as older," she suggested, so quietly that his resolve was shaken.

"It will be hard to forgive me, I think, afterwards," he deprecated.

"What shall I have to forgive? 'Tis I that ask the tale."

"It is a story of unfortunate love," he said, regarding her narrowly.

Her head drooped farther. "Tell me all now, monsieur."

And so, out of an impulse which he could not have traced to its source, but which proceeded from a spirit of honesty and true chivalry, Claude recounted, with the utmost gentleness and delicacy, some of the incidents which had led to his exile. He said just enough of his cousin to let his listener decide what his feeling for her had been. And Deborah, oddly enough, perhaps, shrank from no part of the recital. She forgot herself, and saw through the eyes of the narrator all that he was describing. In their recent, half-serious talks on French life, the girl had gained a remarkably clear idea of what that life must be; and now this story affected her very differently than it would have done had it been her first glimpse of another existence. It resembled one of her vague dreams, this sitting alone in the cloud-darkened room, the feeble candle mingling its beams with the gloomy daylight; the shadowy figure of the man before her, and his low voice carrying on its story, seeming to be things very far away. And the fresh rain pelted on the windows, while the deep mono-



“‘GO ON, MONSIEUR,’ MURMURED DEBORAH”

tone of the thunder made a fitful and fitting accompaniment to the narrative.

"So, mademoiselle, it was there in the chapel that M. de Maurepas delivered me the letter from the King. Henri, madame's brother, was with me. I read the letter just there. I have forgotten if I spoke after it, or if either of them addressed me. Henri, I think, led me out and away, into the town, to our apartment. But next morning it was all very clear. Henri seemed to feel more than I. Later on that day I went to bid madame good-bye. She was very gracious—yes, most gracious."

"How could you go to see her? I should not have done so."

"Ah, mademoiselle, I had to see her. I wished to take her with me as my wife. She did not come. *Non*. She gave me, instead, to bring away for memory of her—this." Claude put his hand inside his vest and brought out two things, the long white gauntlet, and a letter with the royal seal. As he handed the gage to Deborah, the paper dropped to the floor.

While the girl looked at the glove for the second time, de Mailly picked up his letter of exile, and sat smoothing it on his knee. Then he asked, unthinkingly: "This letter from the King—will you read it?"

She held out her hand and took the small, worn paper with its red-brown seal and the arms of France upon it. Regarding the fine, crabbed writing, she said, with a faint smile: "I do not easily read French, monsieur."

"Shall I read it to you, then, as well as I can—in English?"

She nodded once more, and he, taking the missive from her hand, cleared his throat and began, with a little effort:

"Owing to certain circumstances which of late have had the misfortune greatly to displease S. M., the King desires to inform Count Claude Vincent Armand Victor de Nesle de Mailly that the absence of the Count from the château and city of Versailles after the noon of Friday, January 22d, in this year of 1744, will be desirable to S. M. ;

and that after the first day of the month of February, Monsieur the Count, if he has not already crossed the line of the French Kingdom, would of necessity be placed under the escort of one of his Majesty's officers. The King wishes monsieur a delightful journey, and—'

Claude's eyes, running on before his tongue, suddenly realized the subject of the next few lines, and he suddenly stopped.

"Go on, monsieur," murmured Deborah, after an instant.

"Mademoiselle, I—cannot. There is nothing more."

"Go on, monsieur," she repeated, quietly.

Claude passed his hand over his brow. Then he lifted the letter again and continued: "'—and begs further to add that when monsieur shall desire to present Madame la Comtesse his wife to their Majesties at Versailles, his return to his present abode will be most pleasing to

"'LOUIS R.'"

At the close of the last line Claude looked up, apprehensively. Deborah was very white, and there was an unusual brightness in her eyes. He could not catch her glance. Her head drooped, and presently she covered her face with her hands. He sprang up, impetuously.

"Deborah—Deborah—forget that last! I—didn't mean to read it."

He spoke rather incoherently. Perhaps the girl did not even understand him. At any rate, after a moment, she lifted her head with a dignity that Claude did not know. "I thank you, M. de Mailly, for telling me the story as I asked." There was a little, wretched pause, and then she added, more faintly: "See, the storm is nearly over. I must go back now—to the doctor's house."

CHAPTER VII

The Pearls



NOTHER week went by, and Deborah, quite recovered from her slight illness, bade Dr. Carroll and his sisters good-bye and returned, on a Sunday afternoon, to the Trevor place. It was then about the 1st of August, and certain rumors relative to the reception of the returning commissioners from Lancaster, rumors dearly exciting to the feminine heart, began to radiate from the gubernatorial palace and to spread throughout the country-side. For once in its long existence rumor spoke truth. Upon the 6th day of August were issued elaborate cards ("tickets," they called them then) of invitation for a Governor's ball to be given upon the evening of the 21st to the returning officials. With the delivery of these cards a thrill of excitement and anticipation pulsated through all Anne Arundel County, even running a little way over its irregular borders; and innumerable were the earnest conversations through town and country houses as to costumes suitable for such an occasion. Great hopes, that sank often to despair, were entertained of the arrival of the *Baltimore*, with her usual cargo of vain and delightful things. It was calculated with the nicest discrimination that she might reach port, provided the winds were amiable to an impossible degree, as early as the 15th. Then the weather of the West Atlantic was watched with supreme interest. It certainly was all that could be desired. Nevertheless, the 15th came and went without the *Baltimore*, and there was wailing on both sides of the Severn. In time the interest in the ship's arrival came to surpass its object;

though, indeed, Betty Pritchard voiced many another's feeling when she one day cried out, wofully :

"If the *Baltimore* doesn't come in, I'll have no pink taffeta for a petticoat to my satin overdress. If I don't have the petticoat, I won't go to the ball; and if I don't go to the ball, I shall die!"

One of the most anxious watchers for the arrival of the ship was, oddly enough, Madam Trevor. Her anxiety concerning it quite passed the comprehension of her daughters, who had not a suspicion of what was in their mother's mind. Vincent knew more, but had never seen fit to talk to his sister on the subject of the pearls which were to form Virginia Trevor's ornaments on the day that she married Sir Charles. It was tacitly understood between young Trevor and his mother that he should speak to his cousin on the arrival of the jewels, and it was madam's ambition to be able to spread the news of Virginia's engagement at the much-talked-of ball.

The *Baltimore* was a considerate ship, and her captain the favorite of all sea-going men in Annapolis. Neither lost a reputation this time, for, on the 20th of August, at ten o'clock in the morning, the *Baltimore* cast anchor in the lower piers, and Annapolis womanhood sighed with relief. It was but seven o'clock on the evening of the same day, and the Trevor family sat at supper in the glass room, watching the twilight deepen over the scented garden, when Pompey hastily entered to announce the unexpected arrival of young Charles Carroll.

"An' he say *Baltimo'e* 's heah, Mis' Trev'," he added, eagerly, glad to be the first with the news.

Madam Trevor rose with a light in her face as the doctor's son came merrily in. Having saluted each member of the party, he advanced to the mistress of the house, paused for an instant to take on an air of heavy responsibility, and finally produced, from the pockets of his new cloth coat, two packages, wrapped in paper and tied with cord, the one square and flat, the other five inches thick and also square.

"From Captain Croft," he observed, handing them to

Madam Trevor, while all at the table looked on with interest. In a moment the strings were cut, and the paper wrappings thrown off. Two cases of dark green morocco appeared. With a deep-drawn breath her mother carried them round the table and set them before Virginia.

"They are to be yours," she said, gently. "Open them."

Virginia, surprised, but unmoved, lifted the covers from the cases. In one, upon a green satin lining, reposed a necklace of round, softly shining pearls, set in gold, with a pendant of pear-shaped pearls and sapphires. The other case contained a hair ornament, also of pearls, pink and black, in two even rows, surmounted by a delicate scroll-work of the smaller stones, that shone in the dusk with exquisite beauty.

Virginia drew a deep sigh of admiration. Lucy cried out with delight; and Madam Trevor and the gentlemen, looking on in high interest, did not notice Deborah, who sat silent, eager, with her great eyes fixed in unwinking fascination on the perfect gems.

"Put them on, Virginia," cried young Charles, and there was a murmur of approval.

Lilith, who had been standing by her husband at a little distance, lost in admiration, nudged old Adam.

"Fetch some can'les," she whispered, excitedly.

Virginia, with a little smile, took up the necklace, and her mother clasped it about her slender throat. Then the tiara was set and pinned upon her powdered curls, and Adam, coming forward with a candle in each hand, held the lights up before her.

"'Ginny, you must wear them to the ball!" cried Lucy, ecstatically.

Virginia had no time to reply, for her mother gently interposed: "They are not Virginia's yet, Lucy. She shall wear them on her wedding-day."

Charles Fairfield started slightly as his unfortunate eyes suddenly encountered those of Virginia, who, in her turn, flushed and bent her head.

"I shall never wear them, then," was on her tongue to say; but her brother interrupted.

"Charlie," he said, addressing his cousin, "come down to the river with me and see the moon rise. It's in the full to-night."

"Oh, may I come, too?" said Lucy, eagerly.

"No, Lucy; I need you here," interposed her mother, much annoyed with Vincent's want of tact.

Fairfield, grasping the whole situation, rose at once, without a word. Before leaving the room he stole an involuntary glance at Deborah. She was looking at him, for she herself guessed what she did not know. Her lips were curled into a little smile of amusement that set the man's heart on fire with anger at—Madam Trevor. He said nothing, however, but quietly followed Vincent into the still evening.

An hour later Madam Trevor sat alone in the great hall. Young Charles and the three girls, one by one, had gone to their various rooms, and the mother was waiting alone for the return of her son and her nephew. She was unaccountably anxious over the result of the interview, though indeed there was not one reason which her nephew could, in honor, conjure up, whereby he might refuse to marry Virginia Trevor. It was with the understanding of a sometime marriage that he had come to America with Vincent months before, and because the matter had been so long silently understood, it should not have been hard for him to hear it finally discussed. Thus, many times over, Virginia's mother argued in the candle-light, while she waited. And still, into the midst of her most unanswerable conclusion, would creep a doubt, a suspicion that she would not voice, the name of one whom she tried in vain to put from her mind. It was Deborah. Deborah Travis and Charles Fairfield? Absurd! And yet—madam could see the face of the girl as it had been that evening when Vincent and his cousin left the room. She could see the ironical light in the gray-blue eyes, the scornful curl of the red mouth, the unconscious insolence of the long, natural

curl that fell, powderless, down her shoulder to the muslin ruffles at her elbow. Madam Trevor had a measure of justice in her, and she gave Deborah her due, admitting to herself that Virginia, in all her stateliness, with the pearls upon her, would never have tempted man to half the desperation that might be raised within him over this other silent creature, half child, half woman, of madam's own generation.

The clock on the wall ticked ten and went on again. At a quarter after, Trevor and Fairfield came in from the moonlight to the hall. Fairfield was very pale. Vincent's face was calm and unreadable. Sir Charles, seeing his aunt expectant, went over to her, lifted her passive hand to his lips, bowed, and left the room to retire to his own. When he was gone madam turned a puzzled and anxious face towards her son, who stood still, narrowly scrutinizing a portrait on the opposite wall.

"He has refused, then, Vincent?" she asked, finally.

"On the contrary, he will marry Virginia when you please."

"Then he asked too much dowry?"

"He said nothing at all of dowry."

"In Heaven's name, then—what is the matter?"

Vincent sighed, rather wearily. "Nothing is the matter. He does not love Virginia, of course, but—"

"Nonsense, my boy! He would not marry her if she were distasteful to him. Love will come. What girl loves her husband when she marries him? What else did he say, Vincent?"

Vincent shrugged his shoulders. "He said nothing at all. He informed me, when I spoke, that he did himself the honor formally to ask of me the hand of my elder sister. I accepted the offer. After that we walked about. I suppose you will make the engagement public at the ball on Wednesday. I'm deucedly tired to-night. Permit me to wish that you will sleep well."

"Good-night, my dear Vincent. Your scruples portray the height of your nature. I honor you for them—but do not worry. Everything will be well. And so good-night,"

With great relief at her heart the mother gently kissed her son, and then, as he departed with his candle, she blew out all but one of those remaining in the hall, and with that lighted herself to her rooms in the eastern wing.

At the other end of the house, in the chamber corresponding to Madam Trevor's, on the ground floor, was that of Sir Charles. Outside his room, in the passage, were the stairs; and directly overhead were the long, narrow spinning-room, the hand-loom in its corner, and, incidentally, Deborah's diminutive chamber. Sir Charles had retired, for want of anything better to do, and now lay on his cool, flat bed, sleepless, restless, and a prey to unhappy thoughts. It had come to pass, that thing which he had dreaded all the summer through. He was engaged to marry Virginia Trevor. In a night or two all Maryland would be ringing with the affair. In as many months he and his bride would be leaving the colonies, Annapolis, the plantation—in short, Deborah—probably forever. And Sir Charles twisted and turned and tried to put the grayish eyes and the curling red lips out of his mind. They refused to go. Finally another thought came to bear them company—a thought generated by them, perhaps, and certainly bold enough and daring enough to smack of the Court of a Stuart, and to seem absolutely mad in this prim colonial bedroom of old George Guelph's staid American dependency. None the less the thought had found a congenial home, and it expanded, flourished, and gained body and limb till a merry, full-grown plot was playing havoc with young Fairfield's hope of sleep. He continued to lie there, restless and scheming, till all his own thoughts were banished by the sound of footsteps and a trailing of garments, and a curious liveliness of movement coming to his quickened senses from the room overhead.

Deborah also was awake. Rather, the moonlight, creeping along the pillow to her face, had roused her, by slow degrees, from a half waking dream. Alone, in the silent, enchanted night, with no disturbing day-thoughts to ban-

ish the lingering visions of sleep, the dream stayed and grew to be a fantasy of reality. She rose from her bed and moved slowly towards her open windows, through which the bluish silver moonlight flowed, changing the room into a misty-veiled fairy place. Below, outside the window, lay the dreaming rose-garden. The lazily floating odor of full-blown flowers came up to her, as incense on its way to a higher heaven. Beyond this lay the deep-shadowed wood, with here and there a high, feathery tree-top waving to the stars. The rippling plash of the river played a low accompaniment to the night hymns of the myriad creatures singing through the country-side. Far beyond the garden, rising like two cloud-shadows through the luminous night, were the great tobacco barns. Slave-cabins, still-house, kitchen, well-sweep, all were changed, by the mysterious power of night, to things of natural beauty. And Deborah was changed. Her dreams had been of courts and palaces, of dimly resplendent royal figures, among which she, and Charles Fairfield, and Claude de Mailly moved in inexplicable near-relationship. She, Deborah Travis, had just been crowned Queen of all Europe by the hand of Majesty, with her cousin Virginia's pearls. Now, in the waking dream, Deborah could not turn her thoughts from those same softly shining things that Virginia was to wear upon her wedding-day.

Presently, with this single image in her mind, Deborah found herself outside her room, and creeping, in her white garment, with naked feet, down, down the stairs, past Sir Charles's door, through the deserted, moonlit living-rooms, with their misplaced furniture and the scattered articles of a day waiting for dawn and Lilith to be put straight. She passed across the sitting-room, down the east passage, and, finally, in at the doorway of Madam Trevor's dressing-room. Once inside Deborah halted. Madam Trevor's garments lay, neatly folded, upon a chair. The door to the bedchamber beyond was half closed. From within came the light sound of regular

breathing. Deborah smiled, and turned to the great black chest of drawers beside the window. Here also the moonlight illumined her way. She opened the top drawer noiselessly. Within, on a bed of lavender, lay the two morocco cases for which she had come. She took them up, left the drawer open, and glided quietly away again.

Once more in her own room the girl opened the cases and placed them on her dressing-table, their priceless contents all unveiled. Then she went to her own chest of drawers, and took from one of them the dress that she was to wear two nights later at the Governor's ball, a petticoat of stiff, white satin, and an overdress of China crêpe, of the color of apple-blossoms, a thing that clung lovingly to her lithe figure, and vied in softness of tone with her neck and arms. These things she put on, with rapid, careless precision; and then, her fingers grown a little colder, she lifted the pearl necklace from its satin bed and clasped it about her warm throat. Afterwards she sat down on a low chair before the dressing-table, with its dim mirror, and took the tiara from the other box, placing it over her rebellious, silky curls.

"Ah, Claude, Claude, how was it that thy cousin looked?" she murmured indistinctly, with a vague smile at her thought.

The dreamy, languorous eyes that knew not all they beheld, gazed at the reflected image of her face. How beautifully the young head in its coronet was poised upon the pearl-wreathed neck! Was it a new Deborah sprung to life here, in this August midnight? Was it only a momentary madness that should not be told, this carrying out of a dim vision? What was it that Deborah murmured to her mirror? What did she say to the shadowy throngs of courtiers that pressed about her chair? Was ever la Châteauroux more regal, more gracious? Were ever Comtesse de Mailly, and poor little Pauline Félicité, Marie Anne's predecessors, more gay, more delicately glowing, than this other, of alien race?

From the heap of her finery Deborah sought out a paint-

ed fan, and, with this finishing touch of coquetry, she began walking up and down her tiny room, pausing now and then at the window, for the night would not be disregarded, waving the fan with an air inimitable and unacquired, seeing herself thus in the Orangerie of Versailles, or on one of the Paris boulevards as crowded with fashion and gallantry upon a Sunday afternoon. After a little she grew tired, and her mind dropped its imaginings. She seated herself beside the window, and, unclasping the necklace, took it off and held the jewels up in the moonlight, pressing their soft smoothness to her cheek, where the pendant drops hung like falling tears.

Suddenly, upon the perfect stillness around her, broke a sound. Slow stealthy footsteps were crossing the floor of the spinning-room just outside. Deborah grew cold with instant terror. She heard a hand placed upon her door, and then came a voice, soft, well known, through the stillness: "Deborah—Deborah!"

It was the lightest of whispers, but every accent fell distinctly on the girl's terrified ears. Moving noiselessly in her bare feet, she carried the necklace to the bureau, took the ornament from her head, and laid each piece in its case. Then, running across the floor, she knelt in her ball-dress, at the door, grasping its handle firmly.

"Deborah—you are awake?" repeated Sir Charles, more delicately yet.

The girl breathed fast, but made not a sound. Only her hand tightened upon the handle, and her figure stiffened with determination.

"Let me come in," he said.

Then silence fell between the two, separated by three inches of board and Deborah's will, there in the August night. There was no one to know that he was there. Vincent, and Lucy, and young Charles Carroll, sound sleepers all of them, were in the body of the house; and Virginia was above her mother in the far eastern wing. The muscles in Deborah's body grew more rigid, and desperately she held herself against the door. But Fairfield was making

no effort to enter. It should be only with her own consent that he would do that.

"Deborah—beloved—open to me! Deborah—hear me as I have heard you for an hour past. Let me in—Deborah—my dear!"

She shut her eyes and pressed her forehead against her arm. There was a silence, breathless, endless, terrifying to the girl in the room. Then her weight of fear was lifted. The footsteps slowly retreated from her door, out of the spinning-room, down the stairs, and entered into the room below her own. She sank weakly to her knees, and a breath like a sob shook her slight frame. She was intensely sleepy now. For very weariness, it was hard to realize the crisis through which she had passed. But there was a task still before her, and one at which she trembled. Rising unsteadily, too wise to give herself time to think, she took the jewel-cases from her toilet-table, opened her door, crept out, and down the stairs, and passed stealthily back to madam's dressing-room. The room, the drawer, were as she had left them. Replacing Virginia's pearls in their bed of lavender, she pushed the drawer to, inch by inch, till it was closed. Three minutes later she had once more crossed the threshold of her own room. And while the pale moon set and the day dawned in crimson and turquoise over the distant Chesapeake, Deborah slept dreamlessly—Claude, and the Versailles pageants, and Charles Fairfield's strange madness all lost to her for the moment under the spell of the great blessing of youth.

Matters were different with Sir Charles, below. No sleep had the dusky dawn, with its liquid bird-warblings and its fresh day-odor, for him. He was thinking of what he had done—and of what he should do. The impulse that had driven him to go to the room above was past now. He knew only that he had forfeited her very tolerance of him; and the thought quickened his half-generated love into a sudden, fervid life that swayed his senses and fired his brain to plots and plans of unwise daring. At six o'clock he was dressed, and sat him down to wait for Deborah's waking.

It was an endless hour, and day had begun over the whole plantation before he heard her cross the floor over his head, and knew that his waiting was bounded at last.

Deborah was half dressed before the sudden memory of the past night flashed over her. Then her hands dropped to her sides, and she sat still for a little, thinking. How should she meet Charles Fairfield before them all—or, worse yet, if possible, alone? How could he meet her? Had she done anything wrong? No. What he had done was not her concern. And thereupon, with a lighter heart, but doubt still in her face, she finished dressing, set her room to rights—for she was immaculately neat—and started away without seeming reluctance. She was going downstairs, her thoughts centred on the breakfast-room as the place of ordeal. The door at the stair-foot opened; Sir Charles came out of his room and stood below her, barring the way.

She stopped stock-still, noting the pallor of his face and the dark circles below his blue eyes. Then suddenly she smiled, and said, brightly, "Good-morning, Sir Charles."

"Is it good-morning to me, Deborah? Deborah, I make you my humblest apologies. I crave your for—"

She came down the last three steps with a changed expression. "We'll not speak of that," she said, slowly, in a perfectly frigid tone.

Thereupon she would have passed him, but he caught her suddenly by the delicate wrists. "Yes, we will speak of it, Debby. I will have it so. You shall grant me pardon, Debby."

"And why, sir, pray? Is my pardon at your command?"

"You'll forgive me because—because I love you, Deborah. You'll forget when you are become my wife. You will pardon me when you know all."

Down the upper hall came the blithe, morning whistle of young Charles Carroll. He was approaching the stairs.

"Speak to me, Deborah," muttered Fairfield, with desperate earnestness.

Deborah gave him a long, strange look from her gray

eyes. It was an inscrutable look, one that baffled him who caught it; but he did not know that the feeling which it called forth had baffled also the girl.

"Good-morning to you, Deborah!" cried young Charles. "Good-morning, Fairfield! Oh, but I'm hungry! Are we going to breakfast now?"

"Yes, I suppose so," responded Deborah, absently.

"Do you return to town this morning?" inquired Fairfield, as they all passed through the sitting-room.

"Yes. Though if I could help it, I would not."

"I'll ride with you, then. I am going to-day to call on Rockwell. Good-morning, Lucy. Ah, Vincent!"

"You ride to town to-day?" inquired Vincent, when the greetings were over. "You'll see Rockwell to-morrow, you know, at our famous ball."

"Um—yes, but I prefer to-day. I've a matter to arrange with him."

At this speech Deborah glanced at Fairfield, and, at the meaning in his look, a wave of color rolled swiftly over her face. It was as well that, at this moment, Madam Trevor, with Virginia close behind her, entered the breakfast-room, and the morning meal **began**.

CHAPTER VIII

The Governor's Ball



TUESDAY passed as rapidly or as slowly as one would have had the last day before a long - looked - for event. Sir Charles rode away in the early morning, but returned to the plantation in the afternoon, to find even Vincent busy over a package of finery sent out, at Madam Trevor's order, from the *Baltimore*. Sir Charles himself was not interested. His spotless full-dress uniform, his orders, his finest ruffles, his paste buckles and silk stockings were quite ready, and there were no further touches that he could add to the costume. During the afternoon and evening he paid no attention at all to Deborah, but was, on the contrary, so attentive to his *fiancée* that Madam Trevor softened and grew voluble with pleasure.

Wednesday dawned clear and hot, and from earliest morning every household in the county was in a moil of final preparation. Governor Bladen was to give a dinner to the commissioners and his own staff and officials before the ball. To this, of course, Sir Charles had been bidden, and he, therefore, was to leave the house at four in the afternoon, fully dressed for the evening, wrapped about in a long and voluminous cloak to protect him from the dust and the foam of his horse. As he passed through the sitting-room on his way out to the portico, where his animal waited, he found Deborah standing by a tableful of moss-roses which she was sorting. Passing close to her side he said, gallantly: "Faith, Debby, you'll be no fairer to-night in the satins than you are now in calico."

And, while he stopped to take a bud from the heap, he added, in a rapid undertone: "If you'd not drive me mad, little girl, bring your courage with you to-night, and see that you trust to me truly, as I do to you."

Then he passed on, and Deborah, unconscious of what she did, followed him slowly out to the portico and stood gazing after him as he galloped away down the dusty drive. Strange words he had spoken—and the first that he had given her all day. Yet she was not surprised by them. Words were oftentimes superfluous with Deborah, for she had the power of knowing men's thoughts. Dreamily her eyes wandered down the road at the little cloud of dust that lingered after him. She was soon to follow on that way. And how—how was she to return? She could not answer the question, and it was as well that Lucy at that moment called her from the house:

"Come, Debby, come and pack your things for the doctor's to-night. And 'tis nearly time to dress; and oh, Deb! Think of the dancing, and the lights, and our dresses—and all, and all, and all!" And with sober John Whitney gone quite out of her mind for the moment, Lucy fluttered away to her room, leaving Deborah to follow as she would.

His excellency John Bladen, like most colonial governors, knew how to give a dinner to any one, and, most particularly, a dinner to men only. To-night twenty sat at his table: the seven returned commissioners, the gubernatorial staff, the speaker of the Burgesses, the under-secretary, Mr. Robert King, Dr. Charles Carroll (this last from friendship purely), and, for the sake of the Church, the Reverend George Rockwell. The select company ate mightily, but, later, drank more cautiously than usual out of respect to the forthcoming festivities; and finally they sat about the disordered table with some pipes of fine Virginia tobacco, presented by Governor Gooch in lieu of his own presence, some bottles of Madeira from the same patronizing source, and certain good stories, not quite invented for the ear of the Church, but apparently

in no way distasteful to the eminent rector of St. Anne's, who, indeed, to be frank, told the best of them himself. It was a man's dinner, an official dinner, where, none the less, the weight of ordinary dignity was for once dropped off, and all went merry as a marriage bell. Sir Charles was seated opposite to Benedict Calvert, with a brother lieutenant on either side of him. His wit was poignant, his laughter ready, and his head cool, albeit there was enough work in his brain to have made a man less careless too anxious to eat. Rockwell being several seats away, it was impossible to speak with him on personal topics; but the moment it was announced that Lady Bladen waited in the drawing-room, Rockwell and Fairfield sought each other through the little throng, as if by mutual understanding.

"You're prepared to go through with it, George?" asked the young man, putting one hand on the rector's shoulder.

"Egad, if you can go it, I can, Sir Charles."

"You'll miss something of the festivity—but you'll be ten pounds heavier in pocket to-morrow, George."

"Ay. And so the lady's consented? Faith! She well may! It's such a chance as she never dreamed of."

"The lady does not know, yet. I'll take her to-night, in the heat of the evening, when her blood will be up. She's rare, George, she's rare! Odds my life that such another woman does not live! I—"

"Tut! Then you're still determined—that—"

"What?"

"It shall be legal?"

"Zounds, man, not another word! What do you take me for? She's a cousin, I tell you, George. And I'm already engaged to Miss Trevor."

"The devil you are!"

"Ay. I couldn't escape. 'Twill be all out to-night. But I'll have little Deborah if I have to fight Annapolis single-handed."

"Um. About the ceremony—Miriam Vawse will witness for one, but 'tis usual to have two—"

"There's the Frenchman. Faith, that would be a stroke! He's led me a jealous dance for months. We'll have him down from his room to sign the articles—or whatever you do. To think that I'll be a Benedict by morning! Lord! Lord! Congratulate me, George!"

"Come away, man. You've too much Jamaica in you, and the ladies are beginning to arrive. I hear Mistress Paca's voice on the stairs. Come and make your compliments to the Governor's lady."

Having performed this duty as punctiliously as only he was able, Sir Charles left Rockwell's side and strolled slowly up the big, candle-lit room, at one end of which a band of musicians were already tuning their instruments. After a moment or two of indecision he joined a little company of officers who sat together in a corner, talking lightly among themselves, and commenting on the guests who were beginning to arrive.

"Ouf! On my soul, there's Cradock with Rockwell. How do they stand it?"

"Oh, the chaplain's been off so long that he's forgotten how they once struggled for St. Anne's—"

"Or else he wants to hear the story that George wouldn't tell over the Madeira."

"Yes, I've listened to it fourteen times, but always with Jamaica to back it."

"There's Dorothy Mason and her mother."

"Egad, she's got on green again! 'Tis the only color that does not become her. Why—"

"Oh, doubtless young Thomas likes it."

"There he is—"

"With Caroline Harwood. Poor Dorry!"

"I'll go comfort her."

One of the young men left the group and joined the knot of ladies who stood talking at a little distance from the door.

"Oh, good-evening, Lieutenant Henry!" cried a piquant-looking damsel in a gown of rather brilliant green satin, with flounced petticoat of white,

"Your most obedient, Mistress Mason. I can see you will have small mercy on hearts to-night."

"Lord, Mr. Henry, you're the most open flatterer! I vow I never looked worse."

"Oh, I protest! I call the gods to witness! Are you engaged for the minuet?"

Dorothy wriggled her shoulders, colored, glanced swiftly towards Robin Thomas, who still lingered by Miss Harwood, saw that the case was hopeless for her, and so replied, in a provoked manner: "La! How should I be engaged when we've seen no one for a week? Our plantation's such a distance from the river."

"You'll honor me, then?"

"Oh, with thanks. Look, there are the Trevors. They were just in the dressing-room when I came down. You've heard the news?"

"No. Tell it me."

"'Ginny Trevor's engaged at last."

"What! Not to—"

"Sir Charles Fairfield."

"Monstrous! Monstrous! Why, he's been eating with us for three hours and never told! Lord! If 'twere any but you had told me, I swear I'd discredit it. There he goes to them now."

Madam Trevor, her daughters, Vincent, and Deborah were just entering the room. They had arrived fifteen minutes before, and no time, certainly, had been wasted in the announcement of Virginia's engagement. The room was in a buzz of conversation, and not a little of it was relative to the two young people who now stood rather uncomfortably side by side, Virginia straight and cold, her companion cursing inwardly at women's tongues, and staring at the back of Deborah, who was laughing with Will Paca.

"You will give me the minuet, at least, Virginia?" he asked, with considerate nonchalance.

She shrugged slightly, as she rejoined: "Go and engage Debby for a country-dance, then, before she is all bespoken."

Fairfield glanced at her sharply, with surprise in his look.

She was smiling at him in the most unconcerned manner possible. After an instant's hesitation he bowed deeply, and left her side, but made his way first to Lucy, who was manœuvring to avoid Rockwell. From her he obtained two country-dances, for it was the fashion to change partners after the opening minuet and every two dances thereafter. Then he proceeded to Deborah, with whom Carleton Jennings was speaking.

"Ah, lieutenant!" cried that youth, merrily, at Charles's approach. "Miss Travis is just recounting your happiness. I'm in the same estate myself, you know, and—you have my congratulations. Miss Trevor cannot fail to grace whatever station in life she may attain to. I—"

"There now, that's quite enough, Jennings. Go and engage her for a dance, and pour a few of my graces into her ears. I've come to claim some attention of Miss Travis," cried Fairfield, with such unabashed good-nature that Jennings could not be angry. Thereupon, with a smile and an earnest injunction to Deborah not to forget the promised dances, he went off to Virginia.

The instant that he was alone with Deborah, Fairfield's artificial manner dropped from him, and he betrayed the extent to which he had keyed his nerves.

"You'll give me the fourth and fifth, and the eighth and ninth, Deborah?" he whispered, huskily, drawing her a little towards the wall.

The girl looked keenly into his pale face. "Two are enough. Why do you ask more of me?" she inquired.

"Because I have so much to explain to you. Because so much must happen to-night. You'll grant me the dances?"

"If you like. What is to happen to-night?"

He leaned over her and looked straight down into her steady eyes. "I am going to marry you to-night," he whispered, quietly.

Deborah did not change color. She scarcely realized what he had said.

"How? Where?" she asked, a faint smile curling her lips.

"No—I mean it. I will tell you when we dance."

Pausing a moment, undecidedly, after those words, he presently turned and left her there, staring at the opposite wall, not perceiving the little throng of officers who had set upon Charles with sudden elaborate congratulations, a good deal of chaff, and some expostulation, just across the room. Nor did she see Will Paca, her partner for the minuet, till she found him demanding the subject of her meditations.

The first strains of the opening minuet came from the orchestra up the room. The moving throng suddenly resolved into order, and various sets of sixteen were formed. The two Trevor girls were excellent dancers, both showing appreciation of natural harmony by the way in which they managed themselves: Lucy lightly, with an occasional added step; Virginia, with languorous grace, keeping perfect time, yet moving more leisurely than any other woman in the room. As to Deborah, her dancing was, ordinarily, the delight of her partner; for, no matter how lively her conversation, she had never been known to halt at a step. To-night it appeared as though she had forgotten the very rudiments of the accomplishment. She failed on all the returns, stumbled in her courtesies, walked upon the train of the lady in front of her, and, withal, maintained such unbreakable silence throughout the dance that her partner breathed with relief when the last chord was struck and the old people prepared to retire to cards. When Will Paca had left her and Robin Thomas approached for the first country-dance, Deborah shook herself vigorously, and vowed that for twenty minutes, at least, she would forget the existence of Sir Charles, in favor of her partner of the moment.

In the mean time Lucy had stumbled into a most unfortunate situation. The minuet over, she and her companion, talking and laughing together after the breaking up of the set, passed out of the large drawing-room into the hall, across which were the card-rooms. Towards these Madam Trevor, with Mrs. Harwood and Mr. King, was

making her way, chatting volubly. As Lucy and her cavalier passed these three, the gentleman stopped her, smiling:

"Soho! This is the maid who had the impertinence to be engaged before her elder sister! Little minx! And how d'ye like Mistress Virginia's great match with your cousin? And will love keep the rectory warm for you while the windows of Castle Fairfield are blazing with lights in old England? Eh, small puss?"

Madam Trevor looked extremely ill at ease during this tasteless speech, especially as Mr. King did not drop Lucy's arm at the end of it, but seemed to hold her to reply. Lucy's face was flushed scarlet, and, to crown the affair, George Rockwell, with Vincent at his elbow, suddenly joined the group.

"I am not engaged, Mr. King," said Lucy, clearly.

"Not engaged, Lucy! Why, how now! We had all heard from thy mother, here, that Mr. Rockwell was the happiest of men," cried Mistress Harwood, noting madam's discomfort with a spice of malice.

"Faith, Mistress Harwood, my happiness is small enough to-night," remarked the portly George, coming forward. "The lady would not even grant me one Sir Roger."

Mistress Harwood raised her brows in amusement. "For an accepted husband, you are gentle not to command one," she said, laughing.

"Lucy, name Mr. Rockwell his dances at once, if he would still have them from any one so discourteous. I blush for you, indeed!" interposed her mother, sharply.

"Oh, coquetry—coquetry, madam! Youth is light o' heart. Come now, fair Lucy, and make this man happy," put in Mr. King, detaining her still.

Little Lucy raised her head, and caught Vincent's eyes upon her. His glance was not unkind. "I shall not grant Mr. Rockwell any dance to-night, and—and I am engaged, indeed, but not to him."

"What!"

"I am. I am engaged to Will Paca for the next dances."

Lucy was stumbling now, fear at her daring sweeping suddenly over her.

Mr. King, in the midst of his laughter, found breath to say: "Will Paca for the dances, but who for the wedding, little Lucy—who's for that?"

Once more Lucy Trevor caught her brother's gaze, and she clung to it, unheeding Madam Trevor's angry face and Rockwell's mortified one.

"I shall wed John Whitney—the Puritan. Let me go, Mr. King! Mr. Chase is waiting!"

And Lucy, frightened, triumphant, proud of her faith in the man she loved, more proud of her certainty of his love for her, tore herself from Mr. King's loosened grasp, and, giving her hand to Jerry Chase, fairly ran away.

The group that she left behind was silent. Madam Trevor, utterly overcome, had not a word left at her command. Rockwell was in much the same state. Vincent, not a little astonished at his gentle sister's boldness, and deciding that the feeling which prompted it must be strong, was making a decision that was rather remarkable in, and exceedingly creditable to, a man of those narrow times. Mistress Harwood planned a morning's gossip on the morrow with a neighbor, at Antoinette Trevor's expense, and Mr. King decided that, were he a young blade again, it would be a girl of such spirit that he would have for his wife. And then, as the strains of the first reel sounded from the ballroom, the little group broke up.

Sir Charles, with cool forethought, had engaged no partner for these next two dances, but bent his steps upstairs through the house on an exploring expedition. He wandered through ladies' cloak-rooms, round halls and narrow corridors, finally discovering and descending a steep flight of stairs that took him down to the first floor, through a small passage, and out of the house into the yard at the back. This was what he had sought. The little door was open, for slaves and servants had been passing in and out of it through the whole evening; and

so, satisfied in this direction, he returned to the front of the house at the close of the third dance.

Deborah, just finishing a round of laughter with Carleton Jennings, received Sir Charles with admirable self-possession, and they took their place silently in the set, which was a minuet. It was now that Fairfield had determined to set before the girl his arrangements for the evening's reckless finale. Under cover of the first slow strains of music and the first careful steps, he began:

"Have you any partners after the ninth dance?"

"No," said Deborah, steadily, understanding him at once.

"Do you—know of anything to come after the ninth dance?"

"No," she replied again, in a lower tone.

"Deborah—have you courage for an adventure?"

They saluted each other and gravely crossed over.

"I have courage, Sir Charles, if I have the will."

"Ah, Deborah—I entreat you to gain the will to-night!"

"For what?" she asked, softly.

"You know."

"Say it."

"To become—my wife."

Deborah flushed scarlet, and then the color fled, leaving her deathly white. There was a necessary silence between them, owing to the dance. When they came together again her partner went on:

"Would you fear, Debby, to walk from here to Mistress Vawse's house alone at midnight?"

Deborah looked at him quickly: "Why must I do that?"

"Listen." Again the courtesy and bow, and he continued: "After the seventh dance—you are engaged to me for the eighth and ninth—you must go up-stairs, put on your cloak and hood, and leave the dressing-room by the door that leads into the hall at the back. There I will meet you and conduct you down the servants' stairs, and you can escape the house by the little door into the yard.

You know your way round the garden and out upon Church Street From there 'tis easy to Miriam's."

"Ah!"

Fairfield went on, without heeding the faint exclamation: "Mistress Vawse expects you. I have seen her. She will make you comfortable till I come. I will give your excuses to Vincent, telling him that Carroll's black has taken you home since you have—a headache, or a torn ruffle, or a megrim—anything. I fancy he'll not follow you. As soon as I can, I will go after you with Rockwell. At the tavern he will marry us by book, Debby, and after—after I'll take you to the doctor's, and all will be well. 'Tis not difficult, Debby. Come—you will make me live among the gods to-night?"

He pressed to her side for the answer; but the dance presently separated them and she had not given it. Deborah's blood was running fast; her head was hot, her eyes brilliant, her cheeks flushed, none of which things would have been had she had no thought of considering this wild proposition. Nevertheless, she hesitated. Become Lady Fairfield, and, some day, something higher? She had dreamed of it, it must be confessed, before she ever suspected that such a thing could actually be. She had even fancied, long ago, that she wanted nothing more than Sir Charles; for, as men went, he was, to her, perfection. But this idea had undergone a change, some time since. How long since? Did she care to reckon the days? Perhaps they needed no reckoning. Perhaps Deborah knew very well that since the hour when her eyes had first met those of Claude de Mailly, Charles Fairfield had changed for her forever. But Deborah had been hurt by Claude. She would think of him no more, after that day when, in the midst of the thunder-storm, they had sat alone in Miriam's tavern, and he had laid bare before her his life at the Court of France. Claude de Mailly belonged, heart and soul, to another life. Here was Sir Charles, who could give one to her. Lady Fairfield—Deborah Fairfield—the name pleased her.

"Debby, will you not answer?" came a tremulous whisper from beside her. Sir Charles was becoming anxious.

All at once she flung debate, prudence, the conventions, and—the other man, alike away from her in a jumbled heap, and made reply, clear, firm, unhesitating, to his question:

"Yes, Sir Charles. I grant your wish. Shall we walk a little?"

A curious tone in which to decide one's destiny, and a curious choice of words to express such decision. But they were within possible hearing now, and, besides, Deborah was peculiar. The dance had ended before she spoke, and now they proceeded slowly down the room, side by side, silent, save when they stopped to answer some remark from others. Neither of them was ever after very clear as to how the ensuing hour passed. Both were with other partners, surrounded with other forms, moving, passing, talking, laughing, as though each present moment were supreme. Only when, out of the kaleidoscopic mass, one caught an instant's glimpse of the other's figure, distant or near at hand, a sudden heart-thrill would reclaim them from insensibility, and thrust them once more under the warm shadow of that near-approaching, veiled Future, that seemed to portend so much to both.

In the interval between the eighth and ninth dances Sir Charles again sought Deborah, and his manner banished a lingering partner from her side. She did not once look up as Fairfield led the way out into the hall by the open card-rooms, and then up the distant, deserted staircase.

"You are not afraid?" he asked once.

She shook her head with a faint smile; but her hands were cold.

He put her light cloth cape about her, saw her tie a small hood over her powdered hair, and then he led the way into the empty hall back of the room. Down the steep flight of stairs she glided before him, stopping at last before the closed door, she less nervous than he.



“DEBORAH PERMITTED HIM TO LEAD HER FROM THE BALL-ROOM”

"You know the way? Are you not afraid?"

"The moon is up. Why should I fear?"

Without reply, he softly opened the little door, and his face was very pale as he bent over her: "You'll not fail me, Debby? I love you, dear."

She let him take her hand. Then he bent farther and kissed her swiftly on the lips, for the first time. Her eyes had looked into his for one startled instant. Afterwards—she went forth into the night.

Fairfield's heart was on fire as he watched her disappear down the garden path. Then he closed the door, breathed long and painfully, and made his way back again to the ballroom, with its throng of dancers, the candles dripping wax, the musicians mopping their brows, and Vincent Trevor and George Rockwell side by side in the doorway, looking on together. These Sir Charles approached upon his errand.

"Ah, Vincent—" with a very fair assumption of carelessness—"Deborah is gone home—that is, to Dr. Carroll's."

Vincent turned. He had been watching Mary Chase. "Deborah! Why, what for, Charlie? Surely you've not been quarrelling? She's not—"

Sir Charles laughed nervously. "'Tis nothing but a most vile headache, got from the heat of the room and too much dancing. She wouldn't have me as escort, so I—I sent one of the house-servants with her. She took no chair, saying that the walk in the fresh air would benefit her. She begs that you'll not disturb Madam Trevor till the cards are over."

"Oh, very well. I'm sorry, of course. Er—I'm engaged for the next dance. I leave Rockwell to you." And Vincent darted off abstractedly, after a lively young woman in blue satin, who seemed in no particular need of his attentions, being much absorbed in Will Paca.

"Come, Rockwell, come; we must hurry—she's gone!" whispered Fairfield agitatedly, pulling his companion's sleeve.

The rector stood still. "What the—oh! Your young one, eh? Must I come now?"

"Of course. She's waiting, I say."

Rockwell, who had not yet moved, turned on him suddenly: "Listen, Sir Charles; if you marry Deborah Travis, I marry her cousin, Lucy Trevor—you understand?"

"Deuce take it, man, marry whom you please—except Deborah. Why should I care?"

"You'll promise to take my part to-morrow against that Puritan, John Whitney?"

"Whatever you like, man. Come!"

And so the two men, one still muttering Lucy Trevor's name, the other feverishly anxious for the coming scene, passed up-stairs, and down again presently at the back, where they left the Governor's palace and the ball behind them, to follow in the footsteps of Deborah Travis, towards the ordinary of Miriam Vawse.

CHAPTER IX

The Rector, the Count, and Sir Charles



THE day of the Governor's ball had been a dismal one for Claude. The few people whom he knew in the town were all agog over the prospect of the evening; and, since Governor Bladen had not heard of the residence of the Count de Mailly within his territory, the Count had very naturally received no invitation to the festivities. The hot day did not tempt Claude from his lodging. He stayed alone in his room, and in the evening, after a solitary walk, returned to it again, turning over an idea which had been growing on him for a week—that of leaving Annapolis. After all, its people were nothing to him. He would move on, as he should have done long before; and the girl, Deborah Travis, should occupy his thoughts no more. So thinking, with half his mind across the world, and his heart, did he but know it, all here, Claude sat, watching the hours, dreaming, as Fate had him do, from dusk into midnight with her moon and stars.

Down-stairs, in the common room of the peaceful ordinary, Miriam Vawse also kept a troubled watch, for the part that she was to play in the approaching scene began to appear to her as very doubtful in wisdom. As she sat alone in the warm night, beside her flickering candles, with the hours running relentlessly along, fear began to take possession of her. Half-past eleven struck from the steeple of St. Anne's. The moon was making the whole night luminous. Up Charles Street, presently, a flying shadow came, a dark, wavering thing,

in round hood, flapping cape, and long, light, ruffled petticoats held up for running about two slender ankles. To the threshold of the tavern door the shadow passed, and there it halted. Claude, in his window above, saw and wondered, but did not stir.

There was a half inaudible tap upon her door. Miriam started and hearkened, half believing it her own nerves. Again the tap, more faintly than before; but now good Miriam ran to open the door.

"Good lack! Thou'rt come then, Debby!"

The hooded figure glided in and moved to the table, panting with the effects of the long run.

"Sit down—I will fetch some cordial."

Deborah sank into a chair, threw off hood and cape, and lifted a flushed face. When Miriam came to her with a cup of strong waters, she drank gratefully, and presently her expression softened to a smile.

"I'm here! I'm here! Think of it, Miriam!"

"And you'll leave my door again Lady Fairfield! Oh, Debby, Debby, is it right? Art sure I've done no wrong?"

"Oh, if there's any wrong, Miriam, 'tis mine." She was still for a moment, and then remarked: "Cousin Virginia was to marry him."

"I know. Madam told me long since."

"But he only asked for her two days ago—that is, madam and Vincent made him. And then—and then—"

"Then he told you," put in Miriam, glowing with romance.

"But where can he be? He was to come directly. He vowed he'd be here at once with George Rockwell. Oh, Miriam! If he shouldn't come!"

"Lord! How can you think of such things!" cried Mistress Vawse, hurrying to the window. Deborah followed her nervously.

"I'm sure he'll not come!" she cried, in sudden despair.

"He'll come. He'll come. Now sit down again quietly. There. That's comfortable. And so you love him dearly. How long has it been? All the summer? D'ye

know, Debby, once I thought 'twasn't Sir Charles. I didn't know. I thought 'twas *him*."

Mistress Vawse swept her thumb mysteriously upward towards the stairs. Suddenly into Deborah's cheeks rose two vivid spots of color. She made no answer to 'he woman's questions. But, indeed, there was not time now. Footsteps were halting at the threshold, and there came a light, masculine tap at the door. Miriam flew to open it. Deborah rose unsteadily. Fairfield and Rockwell together entered the room.

Sir Charles went quickly to the girl's side, while the rector stayed behind to say a few words to Mistress Vawse, who was an ardent parishioner of his. Deborah remained passive as her lover caressingly lifted her hand to his lips, and looked at her with deep-seated feeling.

"Miss Travis, permit me to salute you for the second time this evening, and to congratulate you upon such a prospect of romantic happiness as is now opening to your vision," remarked Rockwell, with his most Johnsonian air, as he came forward.

"Since it is in your power alone to bestow that happiness, George, let us, for God's sake, be about it!" exclaimed Fairfield, in a passionately low voice.

Three members, at least, of the little party were growing extremely nervous. Deborah's courage, which had borne her in perfect quiet so far, was beginning to falter. Sir Charles was unreasonably fearful of some interruption. Miriam Vawse was in the same plight, her eyes being fixed continually on the fast-barred door. Rockwell alone was quite at his ease.

"Now then, Mistress Vawse, another candle or two. Charles will stand the expense; for I vow I must have light enough to tell the lady from her husband."

Deborah quivered at the last word, which, indeed, Rockwell had thrown at her.

There was a dead silence as Miriam placed three more candles on the table, and lit them at the flame of the first. Then the clergyman took from one of the pockets of his

coat the prayer-book, and motioned the two to move back a little towards the empty fireplace. Deborah's heart had almost stopped beating, and her throat was so strained that she could not have spoken a word. Sir Charles, taking her arm, gently drew her to his side, and looked to Rockwell, who stood in front of them. He began to speak softly, omitting not a word of the service, even the address to the people assembled, now solely represented by Mistress Vawse, who was supporting herself against the table.

"'Dearly beloved, we are gathered here together in the sight of God—'"

"Oh!" cried Sir Charles, with a sudden start, "we were to have had another fellow—a witness—that de Mailly—don't you know, George?"

"I am here," came in a low tone from the stairs.

"Lord!" cried Mistress Vawse, on the verge of collapse.

Four pairs of startled eyes were lifted to where Claude, who had heard the sound of voices in his room and started to come down to learn more of the midnight arrivals, had halted in his descent, Rockwell's words in his ears.

After the sharp pause, the rector was first to speak: "Well, now that he's here, we'll go on. Come down, sir, and be witness to this marriage."

Claude was very white as he replied, with his slight accent: "I will remain here. I can see and hear quite perfectly, if I am necessary."

"Go on, then! Go on!" cried Sir Charles, wiping his brow.

"'—and in the face of this company to join together this man and—'"

"No—no—stop!"

In amazement, Rockwell obeyed the huskily whispered command. It was from Deborah, and Deborah now, her cheeks feverishly flushed, eyes brilliant, lips parted, and breath quickened, moved, as if drawn by magnetism, from Fairfield's side to the stairs. After a moment of confused silence, Fairfield said, with unnatural calm:

"What is it, Deborah? Come back."

"No."

"Come back."

"No."

"Don't you understand? What is the matter? What are you doing?"

"I—I'll not marry you."

"Deborah!"

After that cry from Fairfield there was silence. The rector, Sir Charles, and Miriam Vawse stood as if petrified, staring at the girl, who faced them with quiet, dogged resolution written in her face. Claude, from the stairs, looked down upon her, scarcely surprised, perhaps, but with a very gentle light in his eyes. His deliberate descent into the room was the first move made by any one. Going over to Rockwell's side, he laid a finger on the clergyman's arm:

"This wedding—it is—what you call—legal?"

"Perfectly!" snapped Rockwell, in anger.

"There's no license," remarked Deborah, slowly.

"Indeed, Miss Travis, I protest—it isn't necessary. This is perfectly legal. It is customary—quite customary. You will have the oaths of two witnesses; though, indeed, with Sir Charles's honor, those are not needed. Let us go on at once."

"Sure you must go on now, Miss Debby. Think of the time o' night!"

"Come—come, child," and Fairfield started towards her, with a little gleam of anger in his eyes.

Deborah shrank back against the stairs; but, lo! with an adroit movement, Claude was at her side, with evident intention of interposing.

"You shall not use force," he remarked, quietly.

"— you! You French hound! Out of my way! I'll have you know your place!"

"I am aware of my place, Sir Charles Fairfield." He stepped quickly in front of Deborah. "If this lady is forced into any action contrary to her desire, it shall be because my sword is broken."

There was barely a second's pause, then came a little whipping sound as two blades were drawn. Claude sprang on guard as Fairfield lunged. There was a flash of steel. The Frenchman made the riposte, and his sword just pierced the white ruffled shirt of his opponent, breaking the skin. The lieutenant paid no attention to it. De Mailly returned into tierce, and parried the second attack with immaculate grace. Rockwell, his eyes wide with interest, dropped his book and came over to watch the duel. It did not endure, however. After Sir Charles' third unsuccessful attempt to break the French guard, he felt his sword-blade seized, lifted, and himself pushed back. Claude's blade dropped. Deborah had taken command of the situation. Drawing Sir Charles' sword out of his passive hand, she gave it to Miriam Vawse, who had sunk into a chair, on the verge of hysteria. In helpless amazement she received the rapier, finding strength nevertheless to rise and go with it towards the stairs as Deborah spoke to her in whispered imperative. Presently, then, Deborah was alone with the rector, the Count, and Sir Charles. All three paid tribute to her supremacy with expectant silence. Fairfield was sunk in desperate dejection, Rockwell merely amazed, Claude mentally reeling, for the horizon of his life was changed. It was a blank no longer. Many things were taking shape upon it. He was prepared, when Deborah took two or three hesitating steps towards him, and said, in a half-whisper:

"I must go back—to Dr. Carroll's. Will you—take me?"

With a glad light in his face, he came at once to her side. "I thank you, mademoiselle, for the honor you offer me. My life is yours."

"Let us go, then," she said, her voice low and trembling dangerously.

Suddenly Charles Fairfield rushed forward and, seizing both her hands, fell upon his knees. "Deborah! Deborah! Deborah! I love you! In the name of God Almighty, give me some hope! I meant everything honestly—honorably—do you hear? The marriage would have been legal. Rockwell will swear that to you. What right have you—

Debby! Debby, you promised! Is it true that you don't care?"

Deborah drew away from him as far as she could. Her face was drawn and weary, and no light in her eyes answered his entreaties. Claude, who had watched her narrowly, now interposed. Grasping the other's hands, he forced them, with a single twist, from Deborah's helpless ones, and then, with that kind of brute strength that comes to all men at times, he lifted the Englishman bodily to his feet, thrust him back, took Deborah gently about the waist, and carried her to the door. Opening it, he turned around. Miriam Vawse, from the stairway, saw his face as she had never beheld it before, white, set, triumphant, his greenish eyes blazing like jewels as he cried out to Fairfield, who was stiff with fury:

"We will meet—where you like, when you like, how you like, but not in the presence of ladies, monsieur."

The door closed, and Claude and Deborah were alone together in the still, white moonlight. She walked herself, now, only clinging fast to his arm, and trembling with the strain of the long evening. They were half-way to the doctor's before either spoke. Then Deborah whispered, just audibly:

"You must not fight—for me. I am not worthy."

"I have fought for far slighter things than this. But do not be alarmed. There will not be much blood shed."

Deborah shuddered, but was silent. She longed unutterably to try to justify herself to this man, to explain the reason for her behavior; and, as if divining her thought, he presently asked, quietly:

"How, mademoiselle, did you come to do this thing? Do you love this Sir Charles? Did you think of the imprudence?"

Suddenly all thoughts but one fled from her. This one she voiced with quick eagerness: "I do not love Sir Charles! Indeed—indeed—believe me—I do not love him."

Instinctively Claude's arm tightened upon hers, but he said no more. He was too chivalrous a man to take

any advantage of the time, the place, and their solitude. Deborah waited vainly for a word from him. When at last they stood at the doctor's gate, she whispered:

"I'll go in alone. I—can't thank you to-night. Good-bye."

One hand of hers he took, and the moonlight and the woodbine kissed each other as he touched it to his lips.

"Good-night," he said. And then, without more, he let her go, saw her pass up to the door, in her pale dress and light cloak, with hooded head bent low. He heard her knock, and presently saw the door opened by a sleepy servant. Then he turned away, back towards the tavern of Miriam Vawse.

Deborah felt no nervousness on entering the doctor's house. It had not occurred to her to dread lest the family had returned from the ball. In point of fact, the last reel was, at this moment, just beginning at the palace. The doctor's slave, therefore, received the young lady in dull surprise.

"I had a headache, Jeremiah," she explained, faintly. "I came home—with one of the Governor's house-blacks. Where's the candle?"

"Heah, Miss Travis. Yo' want su'th'n t' eat, p'haps?"

"Oh yes, yes, Jerry. Send Leah up with a cup of posset and some bread. That's all."

"Yes'm. Lor! Yo' done got headache fo' shuah!" he muttered, watching the candle that she held shake so that the flame was endangered, as she passed up the stairs to bed.

CHAPTER X

Puritan and Courtier



THAT time was it when you reached home last night, Deborah?" asked Madam Trevor.

The doctor, his sisters, and their guests were seated at a very late breakfast, of which extremely little was being eaten.

Deborah looked uncomfortable at the bald directness of the question. Being under no suspicious eye, however, she dropped an hour, and was able to reply, with some nonchalance: "About twelve, I believe, madam. Really—my head—I'm not quite certain about the time."

Lucy nodded sympathetically: "Indeed, Debby, if your head then was like mine now—"

"You will not complain of your health in this manner, before us all. It is most unladylike!" said Madam Trevor, sharply.

Lucy quivered and shrank into silence. She was in the highest disfavor with her mother this morning, and only too well did she know why. Aching head or not, there was an ordeal ahead of her for the afternoon, to endure which she was inwardly praying for strength, but over which she was in reality desperate. If Rockwell appeared at the plantation, as he had vowed to do, with Madam Trevor still in this morning's mood, poor Lucy knew that John Whitney's fate and hers hung in a hopeless balance. And there was no one to whom she could look for help. Virginia and Deborah would be very kind, but neither of them could bring any opposition to her mother's intention. Of Vincent she did not think at all. Had she done so, it would have been merely to add a new

despair; for to consider Vincent as her ally against his mother was impossible on the face of it. So little Lucy reasoned, dolefully, through the meal, till her attention was caught by Vincent's question:

"Where's Charles, doctor—Fairfield, I mean? I haven't seen him since we were dancing last night."

"Sir Charles is not in the house," replied the doctor, with a quick glance at Virginia, whose face was perfectly passive.

"Not in the house! Why—what has happened?"

"Oh, very little, I fancy. Last night, as we came up Church Street, I saw him with Rockwell at the door of the 'Three Blue Balls.' He was probably about to celebrate his happiness. Young men, you know."

Vincent's face grew dark. "Pretty ways for Rockwell," he muttered; and St. Quentin, whose eye was upon him, nodded slightly.

Lucy took sudden heart, but was wise enough not to look up till her mother, much displeased, rose from the table, and so ended the meal.

"Mistress Lettice, we will not trespass longer on your hospitality, for which we are vastly indebted. I have ordered the coach for eleven. You, Vincent, at least, will ride with us?"

Her son bowed courteously, and presently disappeared into the doctor's study, where he took the liberty of making use of his host's desk for a few moments. Upon finishing his note he carried it out to the deserted dining-room, where Jeremiah was clearing the table.

"Jerry, can you do an errand for me this morning—no, at once?"

"Fo' shuah, Mist' Trev', if Doc' Ca'l 'll let me go."

"I'll explain that I sent you off. Here's a note to be taken round to the cottage that Mr. John Whitney lives in. He's a Puritan parson. His house is just on the other side of the Gloucester Street bridge. Give him this note, Jerry, and here's a shilling for some extra tobacco, if you get it to him by eleven o'clock. Understand?"

"Ye-ah! He'll get it 's mo'n fo' shuah. Thanks, Mist' Trev'."

Showing all his glistening teeth, the negro pocketed the coin, which no slave was supposed to possess, and, leaving his work unfinished, departed at once on the very welcome errand which served to let him out of the house for an hour into the August sunshine.

Vincent found the doctor in the hall, and lightly touched his arm: "I have sent your black, Jerry, on an errand, Carroll. It was important, or I shouldn't have presumed. You'll pardon me?"

"My dear Vincent, while you are with me my house is yours. Don't speak of it. So soon, madam? This is a niggardly visit, I vow!"

Carroll hurried forward as Madam Trevor entered the hall. She had just come down, the three young women behind her, each carrying a package containing her party finery and night garments. The coach and Vincent's riding-horse were already at the door. After a chorus of farewells and acknowledgments of hospitality, the ladies were finally settled in the roomy vehicle, which set off in a whirl of dust down Gloucester Street. On their way through the town they passed the door of the "Blue Balls" tavern, and madam bit her lip.

"Virginia, be assured that I shall speak to Charles when he returns. It is disgraceful, it is abominable, this behavior on the very night of his engagement to you. You may be certain that it shall not go unnoticed."

For an instant Virginia's lip curled scornfully. Then all the former indifference came back again to her face. She made no reply to her mother's words, but, as they continued on their way, some other train of thought brought a new expression to her fine features—an expression of resigned sorrow, of hidden suffering, of strong repression, that her mother did not see, and could not have read even had she noticed it. The rest of the drive was silent. Madam Trevor, seated beside Virginia, was very firm of lip, very straight of shoulder, very immovable as to hands.

Lucy and Deborah, on the opposite side of the coach, had no desire to indulge in the usual ball reminiscences common to young girls. One of them was anxious-eyed and pale with foreboding; the other sat motionless, eyes closed, face unreadable, but enduring such inward tumult as none, seeing her, could have conceived.

At three o'clock in the afternoon of that same Thursday a man on foot crossed the narrow bridge over the inlet at the end of Prince George Street, and started up the country road that led along the left bank of the Severn. The day was intensely hot, the white dust inches deep, and what wind blew at all was from the west, a mere breath of parching grass and thirsting prairie lands. The man, however, was not thinking of heat. His face showed very plainly that his mind was some distance away, and that it was fixed on a subject of deep import to him. His prim black suit grew gray with sand, his immaculate queue flopped limply on his shoulder, his face was damp with perspiration, his very eyebrows were ruffled by the vigorous mopping which he now and then gave his forehead. Nevertheless, oblivious of discomfort, John Whitney plodded on his way towards the Trevor plantation, his eyes on the road, his hope in the clouds. For the first time he was treading this well-known path with an untroubled conscience. He was going to Lucy openly, not even of his own planning, but at the request of Lucy's brother, whose courteous note of invitation lay hot under his vest, next to the homespun linen shirt which it was his pleasure to wear.

Whitney was within five minutes of his destination, already visible above the trees round the little bend in the shore, when the sound of wheels rapidly approaching from behind him caused him hastily to mount the bank at the side of the road. A *calèche*, drawn by two horses and containing a man garbed in shining pink satin, flashed by in a whirl of dust, and presently turned in at the road leading to the Trevor house. Whitney pursed his lips, stared a little, and moved on again.

Claude, in his court costume and hired vehicle, stopping at the door of Deborah's home, found Jim, the stable-boy, white-eyed and open-mouthed with amazement at his dress, waiting to receive him and to fetch water for the horses.

"I am seeking Mr. Trevor—and—madame," said Claude, on the step of the portico.

"Yes, sah; ef you'll walk right in, sah—dey's right—"

"M. de Mailly! You honor us, sir!" Vincent, who had witnessed the arrival, appeared from the hall and came hastily out to meet his guest. His astonishment at such a costume as he had never before, even in England, beheld, was, perhaps, visible in his face; but if Claude perceived it he said nothing.

"Come inside, will you not? The heat is great to-day. We—Rockwell is here," explained the host, in a slightly disconcerted tone. He was expecting another visitor, and de Mailly's arrival was ill-timed.

"Thank you," responded Claude, still suavely oblivious, and flicking some dust from his sleeve with an enormous lace-bordered handkerchief.

Side by side they entered the hall, wherein, all very stiff as to appearance, and even more uncomfortable in expression, sat Madam Trevor, Lucy, Virginia, and George Rockwell. There was the usual series of salutations, followed by a pause so heavy, so unbreakable, that Claude flushed. He glanced at the rector, to find that gentleman glaring at him with a mixture of intense apprehension and extreme anger. Madam Trevor looked infinitely annoyed, and her lips were firmly set. Lucy, dull, mute, motionless, was pathetically hopeless. Finally, Virginia, with a kind of dry humor, set herself to save the situation.

"Perhaps, M. de Mailly," she said, "you come as suitor for my sister Lucy's hand?"

Claude turned to her quickly: "I have not that honor, Miss Trevor. I had, indeed, understood that your sister was already—um—bespoken. I came to ask of Mr. Trevor that I may pay my addresses to Miss Travis."

"Deborah!" cried both Lucy and her mother.

Rockwell breathed, a sweat broke gently upon his brow, and all danger of spontaneous combustion was happily at an end.

"Deborah, madame," repeated Claude, quietly.

At the same moment a dusty figure ascended the portico steps and came presently into the hall. At sight of him Lucy grew pink, Rockwell purple, and Virginia Trevor very white. Madam bridled as she saw her son grasp the "Puritan" cordially by the hand, and Claude glanced rapidly over the face and figure, which were not unlike his own.

John Whitney looked measuredly round the circle, greeted his rival with perfect imperturbability, sent a long glance into Lucy's eyes, and profoundly saluted Madam Trevor, who returned the bow with the barest inclination of her head. Then Vincent spoke:

"M. de Mailly, let me make you known to the Reverend Mr. Whitney, of Boston. Gentlemen, you are here on like errands. 'Tis a curious thing. Perhaps—it were as well to settle all, here, at once."

"I protest, sir!" cried Rockwell, jumping up. "The present matter lies between Mistress Lucy, Master Whitney, and myself. I vow no stranger shall be in it!"

"The Count de Mailly is no stranger, sir!" returned Vincent. "He has announced his intention, without hesitancy, before you. I see no objection to his learning that you and that gentleman are rivals for the hand of my sister Lucy, and that you are here to-day in order that the affair be decided once for all."

"I cannot see any necessity for discussion, Vincent. Lucy is promised to Mr. Rockwell. Mr.—Whitney has nothing to do with the affair," observed Madam Trevor, rather insolently.

The controversy being now open, Claude was, for the moment, forgotten.

"Madam, I crave pardon, but Mr. Whitney has just this to do with the matter. It appears, from all I have heard, that Lucy herself does not care for Mr. Rockwell as she should

care for the man she marries. Also—I believe—she does so care for Mr. Whitney.”

“Let me ask, Mr. Whitney, what means you have at your disposal for this young lady’s support? How many slaves have you? How—”

“I have no slaves at all, Mr. Rockwell, being a Christian!” retorted Whitney, forgetting himself for an instant. Then, after an ominous little pause, he remarked, in another tone: “I crave your pardon. I have one hundred pounds a year from my parish, and something laid by. It is quite true that I cannot give Mistress Lucy a home like this; but I will engage to keep her always housed from God’s weather, well shielded from cold, and with enough to eat—if not of the finest, at least of such as should satisfy her, provided it be served with the sauce of sweet content. Moreover—I will take no dower with my wife.”

At this last Claude opened his eyes widely, Rockwell looked put out, and Madam Trevor glanced at the speaker with a new expression.

Vincent, turning from the Puritan with the barest smile at his earnestness, addressed his rival: “And you, George Rockwell—what have you?”

Rockwell cleared his throat, and rose as if he were to speak from the pulpit: “My income from St. Anne’s is, I confess without mortification, no greater than that which this gentleman—um—ah—has just said to be his portion from the meeting-house. My fees and perquisites as Church of England clergyman, however, make the sum far larger annually. I think also that you, madam, and Mistress Lucy, will recognize the difference between the—to speak gently—the somewhat humble abode of Mr. Whitney and the rectory which I myself have the honor to occupy, and where I am accustomed to entertain his excellency himself.”

“Pardon me, sir, but could you indeed imagine that, *after* my marriage, I should not instantly remove to an abode more suited than my present one to a lady’s convenience? Do you imagine—”

"You interrupt, sir. I make no observations on what your conduct will be. I am only aware of what it is."

"It is, sir, so far as I am aware, irreproachable!"

"Come, come, gentlemen," interposed Vincent, in some displeasure, "we wander from the subject. You—a—have not spoken of dower, Rockwell. Of course, my sister, being of our family, would not lack suitable outfit and settlement on entering a new estate. Still—"

"I was sure," interrupted Rockwell, hastily, for the point was delicate—"I was sure that you would regard it as well—nay, might as a pride consider it indispensable, Vincent, that—"

"Stop! Let me go away." Lucy had risen, quivering, to her feet, her mild eyes blazing, her voice low and unnatural. "I will not be bargained for, bought and sold, as slaves or horses are. Vincent, you have insulted me by permitting such a scene. And you—" turning to Whitney and Rockwell—"you are heartless and soulless. Love! What do you know of that?"

She turned, with Virginia at her side, and, not looking again at any one in the room, swept away towards the west wing. As her daughter departed, Madam Trevor rose undecidedly, then reseated herself, with a new and firm intention of having more to say in the forthcoming battle than she had had heretofore. Three of the men, Vincent and the rivals, were staring at each other, Whitney and Trevor in mortification, Rockwell merely in surprise.

"Egad!" murmured Vincent, softly, "the little girl was right."

"I apologize to you, Mr. Trevor, and to Mistress Lucy, for my utterly thoughtless and discourteous behavior," cried Whitney. "Indeed, I was thoughtless and unfeeling. I most painfully acknowledge that your sister's anger became the situation."

"Oh—the lady was piqued, sir, at your lack of worldly goods," observed Rockwell, with a grin of ingenuous conceit.

Claude regarded the man with languid disgust. Vincent flushed angrily, and Madam Trevor rose.

"We waste time, gentlemen," she said. "It is perfectly fitting that these matters should form part of the discussion. For my part, Mr. Rockwell, I am entirely with you. I wish my daughter to marry you, since I believe you competent of caring for her as should be. As to the settlements, of course—"

"Pardon me, madam, but this is quite useless," interrupted Vincent, coming forward, with the light of sudden resolve in his eyes. "You are aware that once before this matter has been most unsatisfactorily decided in this way. My sister has continually denied your statement that she was affianced to Mr. Rockwell, and I have been led to believe that it was through her attachment to Mr. Whitney, who some time since honorably professed to me his love for her. As legal head of this house, then, I cannot feel it otherwise than just to insist that my sister herself, and none other, shall choose between these two; and I now say that it shall be entirely without consideration of dower, settlement, or—perquisite. Further, I maintain that, if Lucy choose to reject both of these gentlemen, of her own free will, she shall thereafter be housed and protected under my roof till she find some one to her taste, or till she die here unmarried."

"Well spoken, sir!" cried Whitney, bravely, while Madam Trevor stood aghast, and Claude, intensely interested in the scene, deliberately crossed the room and sat down with his back to the wall.

"You mean to inform me that my authority is at naught in this household?" inquired Madam Trevor, hoarse with excitement and anger.

"I am thinking only of Lucy's happiness," returned her son, gently. "She must be called to come back."

"I, certainly, shall not remain to witness this scene."

"Gentlemen, excuse me for one instant. I will summon my sister."

Vincent left the room; but, in spite of herself, his mother stayed. She was too deeply interested to go; and, despite her traditions, Lucy's happiness was really quite as dear

to her as to her son. Claude, from behind the others, philosophized a little in the silence. How differently had such a scene been conducted in his country! There would have been no argument, no difficulty. Above all, Lucy herself would have been the last person to be consulted. Rockwell, for his means and position, would certainly have been chosen; and, if it were a Court affair, Whitney might have become her general escort afterwards. Claude sighed. This colonial boorishness produced far better results. Ethics here were regarded with some degree of blind appreciation. In his own country it was not so. A second sigh was in his heart when Lucy, preceded by her brother, re-entered the room.

There was still perfect silence. Near the doorway the young girl paused. She was pale and red-eyed, but steady of manner. The two clergymen, side by side, faced her, with Vincent to the right, and his mother upon the left. Claude, quite forgotten, still looked on from the opposite wall.

"Lucy, I have brought you back here that you yourself may make choice between these men. Let me now, then, entreat you, most earnestly, to consider, to decide not hastily, but as in heart and mind you deem wisest. Love is not always all. Respect—firmness—wisdom—ability to protect—these are as strong. I place confidence in you, Lucy; and, in return, I ask sincerity from you. We will wait as long as you will. Choose."

During his words Lucy had looked earnestly at her brother. Now, however, her eyes fell. A delicate smile broke over her face, and when finally she looked up it was to encounter the eyes of John Whitney, who was regarding her with a look of such mingled love, fear, and longing, that she would not torture him by suspense. Gently she extended one hand, one arm to him, while her lips smiled "Come," and her face grew beautiful with the love-light in it.

He went, never heeding the rest, no longer aware, perhaps, that they were by. And, as he clasped her in his

strong, young, Puritan arms, Claude looked courteously out o' window, but Madam Trevor, with a curious dryness in her throat, turned suddenly away.

As to Rockwell, he left the house very quietly, with just what feeling in his heart no one ever knew.

Then Vincent, all at once perceiving Claude, and remembering his pink satin errand, took him quietly by the arm, and led him into the parlor, Madam Trevor following them. The three sat down in the stiff little apartment, the closed door shutting the two in the hall from their sight. Claude's hour of patience was ended. His time had come now, and he was astonished to find himself nervous.

"I must, sir, crave your indulgence for my seeming discourtesy in keeping you waiting so long. However, as you have been a witness of the affair which detained me, you may perhaps be lenient with my rudeness."

Claude made a proper rejoinder. He was but half conscious of what he said, but most vigorously aware that Madam Trevor's eyes were travelling rapidly over his costume.

"You have already announced, monsieur, the surprising nature of your errand, and I presume that you now desire to discuss it with us."

Inwardly, Claude smiled at the words. They struck him as being very absurd, though, according to prevailing English notions, they were excellently chosen.

"I love your cousin, Mistress Deborah Travis, Mr. Trevor, and I am come to you to request permission to—address her on the subject of marriage. I am a stranger in your colony. I have no friends who know my family and estate. I have brought with me such papers as I possess, such as can in any way speak for the assurance of my birth, and them, and my word as a gentleman, I must ask you to believe."

Vincent was silent for some moments, considering; while Claude drew from one of his side pockets a little, flat parcel of papers, and sat nervously fingering them.

It was Madam Trevor, who, after she had once more minutely examined him, from his bag-wig to his red-heeled shoes, voiced Vincent's wish:

"Will you, sir, be so vastly obliging as to tell us, in your own manner, your title, estate, lineage, and means of livelihood? I am sure, sir, that common prudence and the ardent desire for the welfare of my ward will seem to you adequate reason for such a request, and that you will have no hesitation in being perfectly frank with us."

Whatever the reason, madam's manner was as suavely gracious during this speech as Vincent could have wished, and he, therefore, did not add to it, but, expressing his approval with a slight nod, was expectantly silent as Claude began:

"My name, Madam Trevor, is Claude Vincent Armand Victor Anne de Nesle, Comte de Mailly. I am of the younger branch of the family Mailly-Nesle, my father having been the second son of Victor Armand Henri Claude, who died in the year ninety of the last century. My estates, which are in Languedoc, in the south of France, provide me with sufficient rental to maintain me comfortably at Versailles, where I have resided for many years. The elder branch of my family, which takes the title of Marquis de Mailly-Nesle, is well known and of high position at Court. Seven months ago I fell into disfavor because of my desire that a cousin of mine should—wed a gentleman of whom—his Majesty did not approve. I was requested to leave Versailles for the time, and so, determining to travel, I came first to the colonies; and how I have lived here you know. I should be—free to return to Court if—if Mistress Travis, should she accept me, would care to go thither. To be frank, I am myself a little homesick for my country. I should like to go home."

Claude stopped, having wandered too far in his explanation. He saw Madam Trevor regarding him blankly, and he read suspicion in Vincent's face.

"It is—pardon me, sir—an unusual story. Do they

exile men in France for having opinions concerning a cousin's marriage?"

"So it would appear, from my case," returned Claude, dryly.

"Again pardon me—but—have you a document of exile with you?"

Claude hesitated. The last sentence in that royal letter was the most awkward possible thing for a man who wished, in all sincerity, to marry. Long he studied young Trevor's face, and he saw the distrust therein growing with every instant. At last, with an imperceptible shrug, and a sigh, he took from his other pocket the small, worn paper with its red-brown seals that he had read to Deborah.

"It is in French, monsieur. You doubtless read it?"

Vincent took the paper scornfully, and began its perusal with a facility due to intercourse with Aimé St. Quentin. When he finished it, his mother held out her hand for the letter, and, as she read, Vincent, looking squarely into the other's eyes, said, slowly:

"You, monsieur, were the gentleman of whose marriage with your cousin the King did not approve?"

Claude, returning the look eye for eye, bowed.

"And who is this cousin?"

"The Duchesse de Châteauroux."

"Good Heaven!"

Madam Trevor, her face suddenly all alight, was looking at the young fellow in amazement—and something else. Could the other be admiration?

"Your cousin is—the—the—"

Claude nodded.

Silence.

It lasted for a long time. De Mailly felt his cause to be growing desperate. He did not understand. Morals, which were stanch in so far as Episcopal rectorship and five hundred a year were concerned, were nevertheless to be differently regarded in the presence of a courtier Count and cousinship to an almost queen. It was again Madam

Trevor who finally ejaculated, from her whirling chaos of thoughts and plans:

"Deborah shall be fetched at once. Vincent, you will arrange the settlements."

Claude started with astonishment, and young Trevor rose:

"M. de Mailly, you may speak to Deborah. She has free choice—as did Lucy. She is now—in the rose-garden, I think."

Claude sprang to his feet and moved forward a pace or two, looking easily from one to the other of Deborah's guardians. He could not refrain from taking snuff, nor, having finished, from remarking, slowly:

"I shall certainly, Madame and Monsieur Trevor, endeavor to show myself worthy of the trust which you so readily place in me."

Thereupon, with two very polite bows, he left the parlor, alone. On entering the hall he was greeted by the sound of pawing hoofs, a negro's voice, and the steps of two men on the portico. The half-closed door was flung wide open, and Benedict Calvert, with Fairfield at his heels, entered the house. Claude stopped and turned to them.

"The devil!" said Sir Charles, his brows growing heavy.

"Monsieur, your eyes deceive you," responded de Mailly, pleasantly.

Calvert laughed.

"What's your business here?" demanded Fairfield in an ugly voice. He had been in no pleasant humor on his ride, a fact explained by his red eyes, pallid face, and slouching dress; and the unexpected presence of Claude was not calculated to render him better-natured.

"My business here, Sir Charles, concerns myself. However, if you are curious, I am about to offer myself to your cousin, Miss Travis."

Claude spoke with muscles tense, prepared to evade a sword thrust, for he himself wore no rapier to-day. To his amazement, his words for a moment produced no effect whatever on his quondam rival. Then, suddenly, while

Calvert gazed at his comrade, Fairfield burst into a laugh. It was not a pleasant laugh, but it served its turn.

"What a household 'twill be! You and Deb, I and Virginia, Lou and her Puritan parson—for whom Benedict's come to plead. A fine match-maker y'are, Calvert. Why, monsieur, if 't'adn't been for *him*," pointing to the dark-browed ex-commissioner, "I would ha' called you out. As 'tis now, I'll—marry in a week, and be off for God's country, the Mall, St. Paul's, and White's as soon as a vessel will sail; and be damned to the colonies!"

"Hush, Charlie! Get to your room," whispered Calvert, laying a quiet hand on Fairfield's arm.

"I wish you good-afternoon, messieurs," added Claude, bowing.

Fairfield leered at him, with a glint of desperation in his eyes, and started off to the west wing, with Benedict Calvert at his elbow, while Claude de Mailly, musing gently, passed out into the golden mist of early twilight, on his way to the rose-garden and Deborah.

CHAPTER XI

Distant Versailles



HE walked, quite leisurely, over the turf beside the house, past the western wing, towards the terraces that led into the garden. The sunset faced him in a blinding, hazy radiance. At the top of the little flight of white steps he paused. Silence, perfect, lonely, was all about, undisturbed by the bird-notes from the woods, or the murmurous lapping of the river along its bank. Once or twice he breathed, long and deeply, delighted with the pure fragrance of the air. Then, without haste, he passed down into the garden. What a chaotic mass of color it was! All the common garden flowers, perennials and exotics, were at his feet; clove-pinks, sweet-williams, marigolds, blue iris, candy-tuft, corn-flowers, purple-stock, cyanus, carnations, poppies, balsam, fragrant herbs innumerable, the last sweet-pease, pansies and dahlias—all in a disorderly tangle of glory. But beyond these bourgeoisie of the flowers, in statelier rows, with only here and there a blossom in their dark and lustrous foliage, was the *noblesse*, the court of the flowers—the rose-garden. In the midst of this, upon a little rustic seat against the northern wall, in a tumbled, forlorn heap, her face hidden in her arm, her unkempt curls all loose upon her neck, lay Deborah—poor Deborah, whose little colonial world had crumbled about her, and left her alone, wretched, hopeless, in space. In the afternoon despair overcame her. Her work was over, and she was at liberty to think unprofitable thoughts. So, after an hour of tears here in the drowsy garden, the

day finally brought what peace it had to give, and she slept—was sleeping now, in the twilight, while Claude and her new world came to her.

He had discovered her almost as soon as he entered the garden, more by instinct than observation. And he made no haste to go to her, not because he was indifferent, but because he could not bear to mar the perfect progress of the hour by haste. It was almost with regret that he left behind the lower half of the garden and entered the turfy walk between the rose-bushes. From a perpetual he plucked one full pink rose, infinitely beautiful in its solitude, from where it glowed, half hidden, beneath the leaves. Gazing half at it and half at her, he softly approached the rustic bench, till his knee touched her gown.

"Deborah!" he whispered; and then again, a little louder, "Deborah!"

She stirred in her sleep, under the spell of a wandering dream.

"Deborah!"

In slow wonderment the tangled head lifted, the white face, with its tear-stained cheeks, was raised, and the gray-blue eyes fell open sleepily. He did not speak while she looked at him, the actual presence corresponding, with startling accuracy, to her dream.

"I thought—you had gone away," she said, softly.

"I could not go while you were here," he answered, seating himself beside her.

She sighed like a child. She seemed to-day many years younger than usual, and Claude looked at her curiously, wondering at her manner.

"Deborah," he said, gravely, without offering to touch her, "I am going back—home. Will you come with me? Will you trust me? Will you let me make a new life, a new home, for you?"

She caught her breath, as a child, after a long crying-spell, sobs, reminiscently. Then she sat silent while he waited.

"I can't be happy here after—last night," she said, at length.

"I will try to make you happy."

She made no answer, but perhaps he read her mind, for he grew troubled. One thought held each of them. It was that of the fair and stately Duchess—la Châteauroux, whom Claude had loved. And which picture was the fairer, Claude's memory or Deborah's imagination, it were hard to tell.

After a moment or two the pause became more than uncomfortable. Both sat in growing rigidity, looking straight before them, thinking, helplessly. Then, all at once, Deborah, with fearful hesitation, turned her head and looked into his face. And suddenly, when Claude's poor hope was all but dead, one of her hands, cold and tremulous, crept into that passive one of his that lay beside her on the seat. It was her answer. How the promise was sealed—need not be told.

Twilight deepened over the shadow of the dead day. Behind the black, lacy tree-tops of the forest a sunset flush pulsated in crimson and gold. From the still garden the evening fragrance, intoxicating, heart-stilling, to which neither the sunny morning odors nor the night's holy incense could be compared, floated in warm, rich breaths about the figures of the man and woman whose lives had come to join each other over wide seas and many lands. The spell of the evening was over them both. Their eyes wandered. Their thoughts were still. Hand in hand, two of God's pilgrims met here to rest a little ere they moved on again, they sat, silent, nerveless, feeling, perhaps, more of the universal love than that of individuals. No prophecy of storms to come disturbed their hour. Only the garden and the timeless twilight enfolded them. The bird-songs, one by one, melted away. The waves whispered unutterable things. And so, out upon the pale sunset, hanging tremulous as by a thread of heaven, came a fair silver jewel—the evening star. Deborah's eyes beheld it, and were riveted upon its liquid beauty.

"Look," she breathed, gently; "they call it the emblem of hope."

"Hope—dearest? What need have we of hope?"

She made no answer, only her hand tightened within his, as the evening wind blew softly from the west.

Book III

THE POST

CHAPTER I

From Metz



GOOD-MORNING, Belle-Isle! *Is it good-morning? What news from the royal apartments?"*

"None."

"None! Ah! Then madame—"

"Is still on guard; sees none but her own servants, and—"

"Richelieu, of course. Then it is unchanged."

"I fear not. There fly rumors—that his Majesty grows hourly worse. If this continues, the army will be in revolt, the women will be mobbed, and—Quesnay may be permitted to prolong the reign."

"Madame is playing a losing game. She is daring France. I am going to seek Richelieu, if he is accessible. This suspense cannot continue."

"I return to Saxe and the council."

"*Au revoir*, then."

"*Au revoir!* I wish you fortune with du Plessis. You are one of the few who can risk his anger."

The two marshals uncovered ceremoniously. Jules de Coigny passed into the Château de Metz, and Belle-Isle continued on his way to the camp.

It was August in the same year of 1744, and the heart of France, her army, her Court, her King, and—her Châteauroux, was at Metz, in Alsace, a resting-place sought after Dettingen and the long summer campaign. And here at Metz, whence all had thought to depart a week before for Nancy, on the road to Strasbourg, Louis XV. fell ill. That had been upon the 8th day of the month. Now, on the 14th, slow-gathering consternation was

spreading through city, Court, and camp, though, since the morning of his seizure, not a single soul save Mme. de Châteauroux, her sister Mme. de Lauraguais, their personal servants, and Louis Armand de Richelieu had seen the King. Dim rumors that the illness was feigned at first circulated through the château. Then, latterly, more vivid and more startling theories, originating none knew where, but spreading with the conviction of truth, voiced the insistence that Louis *was* ill, worse than any one knew, and that the favorite, coercing Richelieu into her service, desperate with the fear of dismissal from Court when his Majesty's condition came to be discovered, was at Louis' side, keeping at bay the army, the Court, and the kingdom. Marie Leczinska and her dauphin were still at Versailles, praying and fasting, along with the Jesuit fathers and the wearied *dames du palais*, who, in the absence of la Châteauroux, had not a single crumb of gossip with which to comfort their souls till the return of the Court.

Marshal Coigny, much disturbed by his short conversation with Belle-Isle, yet anxious for confirmation of his fears before taking any possible rash steps, hurried into the morning-room of the château, temporary residence of Majesty. The place was crowded with familiar faces, mostly men, for the women who took part in the campaign had learned that their proper place in it was background. Two or three, however, had been drawn hither from curiosity. Among them was a certain pretty Mme. Lenormand d'Etiolles, who, to the displeasure of la Châteauroux, had, for the past year, figured often in royal hunts, and, latterly, played a very conspicuous part in certain thanksgiving services at Lille after the first siege. So far as it could be surmised she had never been addressed by the King, but she was well enough known at Court to obtain bows from most of the men and one or two of the women. This morning she remained beside her husband at one side of the room, watching the throng that eddied about the young Duc de Chartres.

who, as son of the pious d'Orléans, was at this time sole representative of the blood in Metz, and, consequently, was vested with a power which made him of the highest consequence. He alone, of all these nobles and courtiers, had the right to proceed to extreme measures, and force an entrance to the royal apartments when such were closed to the world. He might also, if he dared, demand of Majesty's self, in the face of a created Duchess, his wife's friend, whether such Duchess alone were Majesty's will and pleasure. But the man who did this, though he were of King's blood, must have grave reason ere he should so risk the royal anger.

As d'Orléans' son perceived, from the midst of the throng of courtiers, the openly curious anxiety with which he was regarded on all sides, the expression of care and responsibility in his youthful face deepened. Looking about him uneasily, while he talked, he perceived that de Coigny had entered the room and was coming towards him with rapid steps and preoccupied manner.

"What news of his Majesty's condition?" asked the marshal, abruptly and aloud, with a directness that startled the room.

The throng about Chartres pressed silently closer, and the salon waited breathlessly for reply. The young Duke turned a shade paler, and did not open his lips.

"His Majesty is worse," muttered de Coigny, half to himself.

"His Majesty *is* worse," responded a sudden voice from behind.

The entire company turned sharply around. De Richelieu, who had entered from an inner door, stood before them, snuff-box in hand. His face was nearly as pale as his wig. His eyes were heavy. He looked haggard and anxious.

"Monseigneur de Chartres—if I might be granted the honor of a word with you?"

"But too gladly, monsieur. Come."

Chartres hurried forward through the respectful but

eager throng, seized Richelieu's arm with a whispered sentence, and drew him out of the salon to a room inaccessible to courtiers.

Behind they left a tumult of excitement. Above them, back of closed doors, Marie Anne de Mailly-Nesle, together with her sister, leaned over the bedside of the King of France, alone with a great fear, yet unspeakably dreading company.

Ah, Marie! Marie Anne de Mailly—a dangerous, a desperate game hast thou played for six days—six ages, rather—past! On the one hand Louis' prayed-for recovery; on the other, banishment, perhaps worse, for you; what for him—the Almighty knows. Here in this sultry August morning, in the second story of the ancient Château de Metz, you stand at the bed of the King; not thinking of much, it must be confessed, anxiety and sleeplessness having taken the poignancy from thought. These last days have been very wearing ones.

On the morning of Saturday, the 8th, that morning when headache had driven the King from prospective gayeties to the solitude of his own apartment, he summoned his Duchess to his side to bear him company. The morning was tedious. He could not be amused. In the afternoon, together with fever, came Richelieu, and graceful, caustic-tongued Elise de Lauraguais. And upon that afternoon, when no one dreamed how ill Louis already was, and madame and the Duke were alone with him, Richelieu the daring, now owing half his prestige to the favorite whose sponsor he had once been, and who, without her, would have found his Court life infinitely difficult, had thought, foreseen, dreaded, decided, and easily drawn the woman into his plan. The admission of any other to the rooms must mean, eventually, the confession, absolution, and unction of his Majesty. Before the performance of this last, Louis must repent of his irregular life, and as proof of repentance madame must receive her *congé*—for such was only customary at the great Court of France.

"And so, Anne," Richelieu said to her, in a low, menacing tone, "we keep our places here, you and I. If the King recovers, our power is unlimited."

"If he is worse?"—she looked.

"It is destiny. When we play for lives, we must risk them."

So madame stayed. She thought of that momentous little conversation now, as she sat watching the sunlight play over the drawn bed-curtain. She and her sister had removed from their rooms in the Abbaye St. Arnold beside the château, where they had lodged at first, and taken possession of the royal suite. Their own servants prepared the sick man's food, their own hands smoothed the hot pillow. They had shut the clamorous Court away, letting rumor fly as she would. During the first three days Louis, for the most of the time, sat bravely up, in satin lounging-robe, cap, and slippers. None could have striven more anxiously to distract and please him than the two favorites and the sister. Notwithstanding, upon the fourth day, Wednesday—now the day before yesterday—his body had mastered his will, and he did not rise. Since then time had not moved; eternity seemed settling down upon the trio of watchers. The King wanted no amusement now. He was perfectly content to lie, half sleeping, through the whole day, smiling faintly when madame brought his food, accepting a few mouthfuls with an effort, because they came from her fingers; otherwise unmoved, unspeaking, unthinking. Thursday was the same, ay, longer than ever; and as the three sat silent in the dusk, beside the open window, they had not much cared to talk. Only madame, with what composure she could gather, asked of Richelieu, who had for a moment that day seen de Gêvres:

"What are the people saying, good uncle?"

And Richelieu, nervously smoothing his knee, looked at her with grim significance. "We stake high," he said.

The Duchesse de Lauraguais gave a little cough.

Then silence fell again, while the lips of la Châteauroux closed more firmly, and a rarely seen light came into her eyes. Richelieu's expression, however, did not change. Was it possible that her courage in desperation was greater than his? No. It was this. Richelieu was not yet desperate. There was, for him, still one move that was not left to her. He would not necessarily be banished from Court if it came to a point of extreme unction and madame. But if the King of France were to expire here alone, with them, *then* Louis Armand du Plessis might, indeed, tremble for what happiness life held for him. He said nothing, however, yet. Twilight mingled with the dark. From many windows glimmered forth the city lights, and madame finally swallowed a cup of chocolate and sought her rest. Richelieu was left to watch alone, in the darkness, by the King.

Louis XV. slept, now and then restless with fever, but for the most part quietly. The Duke sat in his chair by the window, the sultry night air stealing in to him, not asleep, but thinking of many things, of much history known to him alone of Court, of camp, of street, and of the lives of real men. All men, beneath their masks of manners, are very real! What a little game these courtiers played! How lives were broken and intellects stunted for the sake of being, for one little hour, associated with that single man born, willy-nilly, to immortality in history! This very King, for whom he, Richelieu, was living a life envied and unenviable, what was he but a disagreeable fellow, handsome, rather sulky, either really or unaffectedly stupid, lazy, unutterably weary of himself and his business, with more of a taste for turning and cookery than for governing a kingdom or managing an army? After all, these Bourbons might have made an excellent line of workmen, all but Louis XIV., who would have been the ne'er-do-weel of them. Not one but had his taste and real talent for an honest profession. And how were France to-day, we wonder, had Louis XV. turned chef and Louis XVI. cultivated to its utmost his no mean ability for locks

and clocks? The night grew hotter as it advanced, and rain was promised for the morrow.

At midnight, suddenly, the King woke, and demanded, in a voice much changed, something to drink. Richelieu hastily brought wine and water, not too cool. His Majesty drank thirstily, and lay back once more, but with eyes open, till the Duke had put away the glass. Then, with unusual directness, he said:

"Here, du Plessis, sit by the bed. I want to talk with you."

"Will you have light, Sire?"

"No. It disturbs my eyes. Listen to what I shall say. You are here? Yes. Well, then, I am going to die."

"Sire! For God's sake—let me call some—"

"Chut! I want no one. It'll be a comfort to go in peace. I am going to die. I have always feared the thought; but when one really arrives at the time—it is not much. I am not afraid, du Plessis. I wish to express to you my gratitude for having kept the Court and the doctors and the Orléans lot away from me. They are bores. What I would say is this: When I am really gone, there will, of course, be a scandal concerning my sickness and death, having none but you and—her—to attend me. You'll get through it, du Plessis. Parbleu! There is no nation that can withstand your manner. My dear Dauphin—ought to love you. But Anne—Anne! Where will she go? What to do for her? Richelieu, I love her. Yes, truly, as no woman before. Take her, then, under your protection. I leave her to your care. Get her from here safely. Send her for a little to her estates, or one of yours. Say that I command her title to remain to her. But, my friend, do not let her marry. Keep her from that. *Par le ciel!* If I dreamed that she would—d'Aginois, or that de Mailly, or any other—promise, du Plessis!"

"Your will, always, Sire!"

"More wine, then. Diable! My head is on fire! More wine, and I sleep again."

Richelieu refilled the glass, which his master drained to

the last drop. Then he sank back to the pillows, turned restlessly half a dozen times, whistled a bar or two in the darkness, and so dozed again, while the Duke, with a new and very heavy weight upon his heart, returned to the window. The King had frightened him more than he dared confess to himself. Certainly Louis' words had been unmistakably sincere. He believed that he was going to die. The King's fear of danger to his favorite Duchess was well founded, unquestionably. But the King's confidence in Richelieu's ability to rise again in the world, Richelieu himself held in very decided doubt. If matters were come to this pass, it were well to act. When a man's Damocles has actually got to the single-hair state, that man, if there be any way in which to move, does very well to get from under it, though he must leave a companion behind, helpless, in his place. The King must live till morning, must absolutely live till morning, and then—Richelieu would once more prove himself a wise man. He must turn traitor to his personal trust with madame and the King, too, for the sake of the safety of the King, and, therefore, his own. If he regretted the inevitable consequences in the career of la Châteauroux, he was philosopher enough to wave them aside without difficulty. Something one must lose in such a place. It should be as little as possible.

On Friday morning the King awoke to find his three attendants all beside him, and what repast he might take—chocolate, a roll, a jelly—not too well prescribed, waiting. From his manner one could not have told whether or not he recalled that midnight conversation with du Plessis. Certainly he looked ill enough this morning. His flushed face was haggard, his lips cracked, his blue eyes dull, his brain feeble, but half working. Madame looked upon him with a pang of grief and fear. While she smoothed out his bright yellow locks, freed from their wig, and bathed his unpainted face and dry hands with scented water, her sister holding the silver basin, Richelieu disappeared. An hour later, when the room was again still, a fly or two buzzing at the window, Mme. de Lauraguais purfling, Marie Anne

beside the drowsy King, the Duke had not yet returned. It was the longest absence that he had made from the bedside, except for sleep. That he was not asleep now, madame knew very well. His bed in the royal suite had been made. He had let himself quite out of these rooms, and was gone—to whom? Whither? And Mme. de Châteauroux, though she trusted Richelieu as she did herself, became, after a little, nervous with anxiety for his return. Presently she moved over to Mme. de Lauraguais, her puppet-shadow.

"Elise, du Plessis is absent still. I am disturbed. Why should he be so long away? Do you think—do you think—"

"I think that he has gone to de Gêvres. He will bring us back some news of the Court. It will be something to divert his Majesty this afternoon, and something for us to listen to this morning. Heigh-ho!"

At this moment the King's hand slipped through the bed-curtains and drew one of them aside till his face was visible. Smiling faintly at the Duchess, he motioned her to him with a peculiar glance. "Du Plessis is out, you say?"

Madame nodded.

"Send for him, then. Recall him at once. He—"

"He is here," interrupted Elise.

The door from the broad hall to the anteroom had opened. For an instant madame's heart stood still. Then Richelieu, patch-box in hand, came leisurely in.

"Ah!" The relief in the sigh was very apparent. "You have been absent so long, we became anxious."

The Duke smiled pleasantly and shrugged. "His Majesty is awake?" he asked, seeing that madame was by the bed.

"He—"

Louis suddenly dropped the curtain, hid himself from view, and so signified that he was not to be disturbed.

"He has just been speaking with us," whispered la Châteauroux, moving again across to her sister.

Richelieu nodded. "You have not yet dined?" he asked, idly.

"It is still an hour to one."

"Ah, true! I had not noticed the clock."

"You are exhausted from having watched all night. Go and rest. I will call you when dinner is served."

A long, slow smile stretched itself over Richelieu's imperturbable features. "I go, then; but it is on condition that madame calls me when dinner is served." With which enigmatically spoken commonplace, he forthwith disappeared.

"It is his habit to make significance of manner count for wit," observed Elise, turning to the window.

For half an hour there was silence, perfect, drowsy. Mme. de Lauraguais' hands fell passively into her lap. The King, under his great canopy, was still. None could tell whether he slept or no. La Châteauroux, her eyes half closed, watched the sunlight play over the roofs of the houses in the town, and listened absently to the noon murmur that rose from its streets. Only Richelieu, in the room beyond, was alert, waiting, as he lay on his extemporized couch. At half-past twelve the King demanded wine. Madame poured it out and carried it to his side. He had not taken it from her hand when the door to the anteroom opened vigorously, and four men appeared on the threshold of his Majesty's bedroom. The glass dropped from the suddenly nerveless fingers of madame, and crashed down upon the wooden floor. Elise, with a low exclamation, rose from her chair, her face colorless. La Châteauroux, leaving the King's side, moved slowly over to her sister, and stood facing the intruders. After the first instant calmness came to her. M. de Chartres had forced the *consigne* at last. With him were the King's chaplain, Bishop of Soissons, Fitz-James, Père Pérusseu the confessor, and M. de Maurepas, possibly as representative of de Berryer. These four men stood facing the Duchess, who regarded them steadily, death knocking at her heart.

"Why—do you come?" she asked, dully, knowing well enough the reason.

"It is time, I think, madame," returned Maurepas, with something ill-advised in his tone.

"His Majesty is here?" interposed Chartres, sternly.

"Naturally," she replied, with curling lip.

"And M. de Richelieu?"

"I have the honor, Monseigneur."

Richelieu spoke from the doorway of his bedroom, where he stood, quite still, a little stiffer than usual, eying de Chartres as though he would have impressed something upon him. Perhaps Monseigneur understood. At any rate, the hesitation became a pause, and the pause grew into a hopeless stillness as the Duchesse de Châteauroux turned slowly about and faced the companion of these last days.

"Du Plessis—you—" she faltered, actually unsuspecting, speaking as if to a companion in trouble.

"Madame," he responded, brokenly.

"Can you—do nothing? Have you no help?" she whispered.

Richelieu bent his head. "Nothing."

Maurepas smiled sarcastically, but no one noticed it. Fitz-James of Soissons advanced into the room, his robes trailing, his manner lofty and severe.

"Mme. Marie, and you — Mme. de Lauraguais—are requested to retire to the apartment which you have occupied since quitting the abbaye. There—later—some one will go to you."

He raised his hand and pointed to the door which led into the antechamber, and so to the corridor. For the shadow of an instant madame hesitated, her eyes passing in a long glance from Richelieu's unreadable face to the great, silent bed. Then, with a slight gesture to her sister, she moved slowly, unsteadily, towards the door which the bishop designated. In silence the five men saw them go. Louis XV., closed in by his curtains, silent, passive, heard all, and guessed the unspoken; sur-

mised Richelieu's loyal treachery, read madame's heart from her steps, realized that his time for repentance approached, deplored the necessity, thought of his dinner, and rather hoped that existence might not be too much prolonged.

While Falconet* was hastily summoned to attend the King, while Monseigneur made humble explanation to his relative, and Richelieu adroitly assisted in carrying out the bishop's ideas for the forthcoming confession, absolution, and unction of his Majesty, the two sisters had gained their apartment. Elise, by this time on the way to hysterics, threw herself desperately on the bed. The sister watched her with pale, silent scorn. Her arms were folded. Her foot tapped nervously on the floor. She said not a word.

"Madame," whispered Antoinette, at last, "what shall I do?"

Madame's eyes turned towards her for an instant. "Nothing," she said, shortly.

Elise's woman was busy over her with sal-volatile, tears, entreaties, and a fan. By degrees she grew quieter, forgetting herself sufficiently at last to look at her sister.

"Marie—why do you look so? What are you doing?" she asked.

"I? I am waiting."

"Waiting! For what?"

The Duchess, who had studied well the ways of courts, and who knew each step of an affair like this, did not answer. Her lips straightened into a bitter smile. Mme. de Lauraguais might read it if she would.

Matters were at this juncture when the waiting was ended conventionally. In response to a rap Antoinette, having received the nod of permission from her mistress, opened the door and admitted Marc Antoine Voyer, Comte d'Argenson, a man closely associated with Maurepas, and hence not loved by the favorite. He entered the apart-

* The King's consulting physician.

ment with perceptible hesitation, and stopped not very far inside to turn to madame. She sat regarding him like a sphinx, immovable, unspeaking. Poor d'Argenson had been in few less happy situations. Here were four pairs of feminine eyes fixed upon him in dread anticipation. How near to explosion from one of them matters had gone, the young man did not know. He perceived by the expression of la Châteauroux that there had been no going to pieces yet. Even while he faced her, fumbling for words, she put out her hand to him, saying:

"Give me your letter, monsieur, or—" the hand dropped—"or was it in words that the order was given?"

"No, madame. Here is the paper."

He took it from under the hat which he carried in the left arm, and gave it to her. It was not long, and the ink upon it was scarcely dry. Yet its seals—those of Orléans and France—precluded any possibility of disobedience of the command it expressed. As her sister read it through, Mme. de Lauraguais sat up on the bed, a growing sense of terror coming over her. Not the smallest expression crossed the face of la Châteauroux. Her mouth was firmly set. She read slowly, as one who forced herself to see written out something of which she was already thoroughly cognizant. When she had finished the last line, madame opened her fingers, and the paper fluttered to the floor.

"That is all, monsieur? Have the goodness to retire."

"Pardon, madame; it is not quite all."

"What further, then? What insult can be added?"

"It is no insult, but an offer of assistance."

"From whom? For what?"

"From the Marshal de Belle-Isle, of his carriage to convey you as far as Nancy, where you may obtain a post-chaise."

"Ah! Coward! So he would patronize me now!"

Madame's nerve was failing her at last. Her face had grown suddenly scarlet, and from her attitude d'Argenson believed that she would gladly have flung herself upon

him to end the matter after the fashion of the Court of Miracles. But young d'Argenson was a diplomat, educated in a famous school, and he had a manner of steel that would not melt before the white-hot fire of a woman's wrath. Eye for eye he met the gaze of the Duchess, and, as her quivering muscles grew still under the spell of his calm, he said, quietly:

"Pardon me, madame. I think that you do not quite comprehend your situation. If you but reflect, you will instantly perceive how much of wisdom there would be in making the departure of yourself, of madame your sister, and of your two women as quiet as possible."

Whether it was his air or his eminently unemotional words that impressed the woman before him, d'Argenson never knew. It was enough that, after a long and troubled silence, la Châteauroux finally raised her head and answered, in a tone but little above a whisper:

"I thank you, Monsieur le Comte. If—the Marshal de Belle-Isle will have his coach at the abbaye door at four o'clock, I—we—will take our departure as quietly as possible."

D'Argenson breathed deeply with relief. Bowing low, he backed towards the door, pausing only an instant to repeat, musically: "At the abbaye door, madame. That is most wise. At the abbaye door."

CHAPTER II

The Disgrace



WHILE Mme. de Lauraguais lived she remembered the journey from Metz to Paris as the most utterly wretched affair of her life. For the Duchess, she expressed no opinion on the matter one way or the other. On leaving the coach of M. de Belle-Isle at Nancy, where they were to engage their own post-horses and chaise, they found that not only word of the King's illness, but also news of the dismissal of the favorite, had preceded them, and was in every one's mouth. Moreover all France was in a state of the wildest grief and anxiety over the *bien-aimé*, as he was commonly known. All churches were open, and in them masses, repeated by priests actually weeping with excited sorrow, were continually said. Men and women of every class left their business and pleasure to join in the universal prayers for the recovery of the King; and the Queen and dauphin set out together from Versailles with a company of Jesuits, to hasten to Louis' side. It was when news of his Majesty's danger was carried to the Queen that the eldest son, boy as he was, bethought him nimbly and made that intensely priggish and uncalled-for remark—the one reason that France really had for rejoicing that their Louis did recover:

“Poor people! You have, then, only me!”

It was said that he had a catalogue of similar phrases for various occasions written down for him by Père Griffet, and dutifully learned by heart.

At Epernay the carriages of her Majesty and la Châteauroux passed each other. By that time madame, in terror

of the people who had threatened to mob her along the way, was travelling incognito in the humblest possible manner, changing places, when going through towns, with Antoinette. Even as it was, their progress was extremely difficult. Four women journeying alone, with no man but an attendant valet seated on the box, to manage for them, were treated with none too much respect in the France of those days. Ere they reached Paris, however, and before the Queen had arrived at her lord's side, a triumphant courier tore along the road on his way to the metropolis with the word that Louis' danger was over, that he would recover. Mme. de Châteauroux had arrived at Meaux, and was resting there overnight, when the news spread through the town. Mme. de Lauraguais had doubted its effect on her sister. When it was told her, however, the Duchess said, very quietly: "I thank the good God that it is so!" and lapsed again into that silence which she had persistently maintained since leaving the King. Later in the night, however, she despatched to Richelieu one of those strange, bourgeois epistles that have come down to us to be marvelled at as written by a gentlewoman.*

Meaux is not a great distance from Paris, but it was almost the 1st of September before the sisters reached their destination. They did not go to the Hôtel de Mailly, for the reason that Henri's wife, never fond of her superb sister-in-law, would very possibly fail to know her now in the time of her adversity. Rather, Mesdames de Lauraguais and Châteauroux retired to a small *hôtel* in the Rue du Bac, which the favorite had inhabited before. On August 28th they arrived, travel-stained, weary, but mightily relieved in heart at being safe at their journey's end. The little house was desolate enough when they entered it, but, with

* *Lettres Autographes de Mme. Châteauroux*,—Library of Rouen: "I can well believe that so long as the King is feeble he will be in a great state of devotion; but, as soon as he is better, I bet I shall trot furiously through his head, and that in the end he will not be able to resist, but will quietly send Bachelier and Lebel to see what is become of me."

the combined efforts of the two maids, the valet Fouchet, and the *conciërge*, a supper was contrived, some beds prepared, and a little fresh air, hot as it was, let through the musty rooms.

At one o'clock of the next day Mme. de Lauraguais, much refreshed by her sleep and revived by her chocolate, entered her sister's bedroom. Marie Anne was still in bed, wide-awake, however, and meditating on getting up.

"Good-morning, Anne. Here is the latest *Nouvelles à la Main* from Mme. Doublet's. Jeanne obtained it for me, I don't know where, possibly at Henri's."

"And what does it say? What—of—Louis?"

Elise's expression changed. "Oh—there is little of him."

"Tell me at once. What has been done now? I am, perhaps, no longer Duchess?"

"No, no! You mistake. There is only his 'expression of regret for the flagrancy of my former life, the bad example I have set my people—a promise to amend for the future, God granting me a life to lead with justice and righteousness.'* That is all."

Mme. de Châteauroux's lip curled, but she said nothing. After an instant's pause she struck a little gong at her side, and, at Antoinette's quick appearance, observed, languidly:

"I rise now. My garments at once." As the maid disappeared, she turned again to her sister. "Is that all your news?"

"No. Here is something which you will wish to hear. The Duc d'Agenois, arrived in Paris a month ago, is suffering an attack of fever at his *hôtel* in the Rue de l'Evêque."

"Ah! François again!" Again the Duchess was silent, and presently a curious smile came to play about her lips. Elise interrupted the reverie.

"I do not understand this, Anne. His exile—"

"Was for two years. It is ended. He served me well before, Elise. It is an omen. Through him I shall rise again. I tell you so."

* *The Old Régime*, Lady Jackson, vol. i., p. 309.

"Be considerate this time, then. Do not banish him a second time. Tell me, how are you going to occupy yourself to-day? One will perish of ennui here."

"One must expect it. Let us become philosophers. I am going to write presently to du Plessis. If Claudine de Tencin is in the city, we will go to her. She will not refuse to receive me. To-morrow—I think that I will go to François. Yes, I mean it. Do not be shocked. To-day I despatch Fouchelet to Versailles with a *billet* to Mme. de Boufflers to send me my furniture, my toys, the rest of my wardrobe, the dogs, and—my servants. If we must live here, Elise, we will do so. I am a little tired of camps and of being continually interested in guns and armaments; this will be a rest, a relief, for a time. And after—when the Court returns—"

"Peste! That will be monstrous."

"Yes," responded la Châteauroux, with a vague smile, "that will be hard. We shall see, however. There will be—always—François. Send now to the Hôtel de Mailly and have Henri come to dine with us—off what we have!"

Half an hour later Mme. de Châteauroux sat in the salon of her *hôtel* composing, with some difficulty, the epistle to Mme. de Boufflers, who, as mistress of the palace of the Queen, was obliged to remain at Versailles during the Queen's absence. It was not an easy thing to make acknowledgment of her disgrace to the woman who, next to herself, was the haughtiest at Court. But the letter was written in some way, and Fouchelet directed to depart with it as soon as he had finished serving dinner. Then Mme. de Lauraguais rejoined her sister, and they sat quiet, together, listening to the hum of the city, the city of the world, around them. Presently a bell sounded below. Some one was admitted. The two listened for a moment, and then Elise rose as the salon door opened and Henri de Mailly-Nesle came in.

"Dear Henri! You are so good!"

"Elise! You are well?"

The Marquis embraced the Lauraguais with some af-

fection, and then turned to his youngest sister, who had not risen.

"Madame, you wished me to come, I believe?" he asked, gravely.

"But certainly! It is three months that we have not seen each other. Is it so unusual that I wish to behold you again?" she asked, loftily. It was not often that Henri attempted to reprove her even by a tone, and she would not permit it now.

Her manner gave her brother his cue, and, with a mental shrug, he accepted it. His manner was entirely different as, after certain conventional remarks, he asked: "You have not heard, perhaps, of the return of M. d'Agenois after his exile?"

"I learned it this morning," she responded, indifferently.

"He is ill, it seems. The air of Paris still does not agree with him." Henri took a meditative pinch of snuff. "Apropos of d'Agenois, Anne, have you heard from Claude?"

"Claude! No. Surely he is not also returned?"

"Not he. He is in one of the English colonies at a town with some impossible Homeric name."

"Ah! I warned him that he would perish of ennui among those savages."

"On the contrary, he would appear, from a letter which I have received, to be very well amused. From his accounts he has met there some delightful people—a charming girl—by name—peste! I forget the name—"

"It is no matter. Claude among the bourgeois! Who could fancy it? Eh bien, let us dine."

The dinner was not protracted, for none of the three found it very comfortable. At its end Mme. de Châteauroux rose abruptly, snapping a finger for Fouchelet, and turning to her brother with the dismissing command, "Summon our chairs, Henri."

Mailly-Nesle went off obediently to see that the chairs and link-boys were ready, while the sisters adjusted their scarfs and caps. The brother handed them out, gave

directions as to their destination, and himself started to return on foot to his *hôtel*. The ladies were going to Mme. de Tencin, who lived near by, not far from the Orleans Palais Royal. Though they had dined at an unconventionally late hour, it was not yet dark, the sunset just fading into a twilight that played in softening shadows about the old streets, with their high, gabled wooden houses, and the occasional buildings of stone. The streets were quiet, for all Paris was at supper. A few chairs, a chaise or two, and now and then a coach with some familiar coat-of-arms on its panels passed them. Foot-passengers were few. In crossing the Place du Palais Royal, however, Mme. de Châteauroux, looking out of the open window of her chair, encountered the glance of a priest going the opposite way. She bowed, and he uncovered with a respect less marked than usual, walking on without any attempt to speak to her. It was the Abbé de Bernis.

"Victorine is here, then," concluded madame. "I wonder how she will receive me?" And at the question a pang smote the Duchess's heart. Her fall was accomplished; but its consequences she had not yet endured.

Twilight rose rapidly now, and it was dark enough for the torches of the link-boys to be lighted by the time the slow-moving chairs stopped at their destination. The Hôtel de Tencin was not imposing from the outside. It was narrow and high, with a larger building close on either hand. Inside, however, it was furnished like a palace, and, indeed, most of the guests who entered it spent the greater part of their lives in or about the abode of royalty.

Claudine Alexandrine Guérin de Tencin, the foremost figure in the salon life of the day, was a devoted friend to Mme. de Châteauroux. The favorite's grand manner and unapproachable bearing were after her own heart, and, since Marie Anne's accession to the highest post at Court, the leader of the salons had actually curbed her wit on behalf of her friend, and refrained from two excellent epigrams that would have seemed to slur the favorite's beauty and taste. It was but this afternoon that, in her

small boudoir, Mme. de Tencin, with Victorine de Coigny and François de Bernis, had carried on a very animated discussion relative to the recent affair at Metz. After tea the abbé returned to the Lazariste, while Victorine, who had no life left after his departure, promised to remain with her friend during the evening.

Paris was empty at this season, and the regular salons were closed. The Duchesse du Maine had carried off all her pet philosophers and literati to Sceaux. That small portion of the Court which had not contrived to follow the army was scattered over France. The very Opera was shut. And thus Mme. de Tencin and Victorine resigned themselves to the most stupid of evenings after their small supper. At something after seven o'clock, however, the first valet appeared on the threshold of the small white-and-gold room, with the announcement:

"The Duchesse de Lauraguais. The Duchesse de Châteauroux."

Mme. de Tencin sprang to her feet. From just outside came the stiff rustle of feminine garments.

"Marie!"

"Claudine!"

The two women flung themselves into each other's arms, touched cheeks, first on one side, then on the other, and finally Mme. de Tencin held the Duchess off at arm's-length, gazed at her through a river of tears, and murmured, in a transport of grief: "My poor Anne!"

"Claudine! Cl—audine!"

Thereupon Mme. de Châteauroux closed her eyes and gracefully fainted away. Elise screamed. Mme. de Tencin, with moans of compassion, supported her beloved friend, and Victorine, shaking with inward laughter, ran away for sal-volatile, a glass of wine, and a fan. When she returned with these necessities, la Châteauroux, reclining upon a satin sofa, was aristocratically reviving. After a few moments' application of the fan and salts, coupled by the consumption of the cordial, she was sufficiently restored to greet Victorine affectionately, and to

recount, with a thousand airs and as many variations, her own story. It was a pathetic recital. Elise wept unrestrainedly, and even Mme. de Coigny became absorbed before the climax was reached.

"And so, actually, it was Maurepas, Anne, who betrayed you?"

"Actually, *ma chère*. There is no doubt of it. I have vowed his ruin."

"If any one could accomplish that, you are certainly the one to do so. But he is called indispensable to the ministry."

"He is the most implacable enemy in the world. But—I also am implacable, Claudine."

Mme. de Tencin shook her head and reflected mournfully.

"What will you do?" inquired Victorine, with some curiosity.

"I? I have a plan. It turns upon—whom do you think?"

"I never think. Tell us at once. I burn to know."

"François d'Agenois."

"Mariel!"

"Again!"

The latter exclamation came from Victorine. The Duchess smiled at her. "Yes, again. The first time he was a complete success. I will make him so this time."

"Poor boy!"

"Yes—he will be banished for life. But there is no one else."

"What a pity that your cousin, Count Claude, is still away."

"Ah, yes. Henri says that he is in America. Imagine it. However, Claude was less useful. I had more feeling for him—my cousin, you understand."

"When do you visit the Duc d'Agenois?"

"Really, I do not know. I had thought of to-night. That would be a romance, would it not? But I am too fatigued. Our journey from Metz was frightful. You cannot conceive it."

"My poor darling! But do let us have some amusement. Victorine is in despair. There are no men in the city."

"I saw M. de Bernis in the Place du Palais," observed Elise.

Victorine colored delicately. "Dear Duchess, he is not a man. He is a priest," she said, lightly.

"And M. de Coigny—he is no longer a man, but a marshal," retorted madame.

This time the little Marquise made no reply. She suddenly turned serious, and a pause crept upon the four.

Mme. de Tencin, after waiting nearly a minute for some one to speak, herself exclaimed: "Come, let us play at piquet. It is the only thing left. Cavagnole is impossible. Mme. de Lauraguais, I leave you to the Maréchale. Victorine, you will be becoming a second Mirepoix soon. Marie, you shall play with me. Come—the tables are here."

La Châteauroux sighed. She intensely disliked cards. "Ah, well—I will play till I have lost ten louis. That—since I have already lost one—is all that I can afford. Then we will go home. François must wait till to-morrow."

"Poor man!"

Mme. de Tencin led the way to the gaming-room, which, to tell the truth, was a principal feature in her *hôtel*; and here the four ladies seated themselves at two tables. It took Mme. de Châteauroux a little more than an hour to lose her stipulated sum, for stakes among women are not high. That being done, true to her word, she rose.

"It is necessary to depart, dear Claudine. I am frightfully sleepy. You have given us the most delightful evening possible. Come, Elise, finish your hand. How much have you won? Come, we must really go."

"And I also," rejoined Victorine, rising from her place.

"There is wine in my boudoir. We will drink to you, Marie Anne, and your great success with the d'Agenois."

So they all rustled back to the little salon, adjusted their very light wraps, partook of the liqueur and cakes

prepared, and then departed, each to her chair, with many affectionate adieus. Victorine, yawning mentally, went her way to her lonely abode in the Rue Fromentin, while the others returned to the Rue du Bac, where madame was greeted with news that made her furious with mortification. Fouchet had returned from Versailles with the word from Mme. de Boufflers that Mme. de Châteauroux's wardrobe and dogs should be despatched to her on the following day. As to the furniture and toys in her apartments, and her private chef and footmen, they had belonged to Mme. de Châteauroux not as woman, but as favorite of his Majesty. They were really the insignia of office, and no longer belonged to one who had been publicly dismissed from her post.

The letter in which these things were said was perfectly cold, perfectly polite, and perfectly unreasonable. Its tone, however, was not to be mistaken. It was the first deep wound given to the deposed sub-queen, and its sensation was too fresh to be easily borne. At something after two o'clock in the morning she fell into an unquiet sleep, and then Mme. de Lauraguais, who had attended her, crept away to her own room, too tired to scold her maid.

On the following morning la Châteauroux had, apparently, recovered from her chagrin. She ate an egg with her chocolate, laughed at her sister's clouded face, sent Alexandre to a furniture house with orders to refurnish completely her present abode, advised her sister to make a round of the toy-shops that morning, and at eleven o'clock re-dressed herself preparatory to the forthcoming visit to her old-time lover.

François Emmanuel Frederic, Duc d'Agenois, returned from a long Italian exile to Paris and fever, had left his bed this morning for the second time, and, wrapped in silken dressing-gown and cap, with a *couvre-pied* to correspond, reclined upon a small couch in his most comfortable salon, indulging in a profound fit of melancholy. His history certainly warranted an occasional turn of

despair. Unfortunate enough to have fallen in love with her who was destined to become favorite of France; unwise enough to have kept his passion alight in defiance of the King of this, his adopted country; unforeseeing enough to have offered the woman marriage; by all these things winning a two-years' banishment; he had now been absurd enough, after the exile, to return again to the very den of the lion. More than this, having, even in illness, learned the story of the disgrace of the favorite and her return to Paris, he was now capping the climax of folly by daring to wish—that she would come to him. What benefit he could possibly derive from such a proceeding, the rash youth did not stop to consider. He only lay upon his couch, very weak in body and very flushed of countenance, hoping one moment, utterly despairing, as was sensible, the next. Really, according to Fate's usual laws, the idea of her coming was utterly absurd. And yet she came. About noon d'Agenois heard, with sharpened ears, the great front door open and close. Then there was silence again, while he nervously fingered the tassels of his gown and stared at the ceiling—more hopeless than ever. Presently his valet hurried in, with an anxious expression on his lively face. Passing to his master's side, he whispered a question in the Duke's ear.

"See her!" cried d'Agenois, leaping up. "*Nom de Dieu*, Jean, fly! Fly, I tell you! Admit her—admit her—admit her—"

Jean ran back across the room, pushed open the door, and stood aside. Mme. de Châteauroux, clothed in clouds of white muslin that floated about her in fold after fold, luminous, filmy, her golden hair unpowdered, curling upon her shoulders, her eyes lustrous, an expression of tender melancholy on her face, appeared on the threshold, framed in the bright sunshine that streamed through the windows.

"Anne!" The man gave a faint cry and began to move towards her, dizzily, both arms outstretched. He had loved her faithfully throughout the two years. Had he not a right to tremble now, at their reunion?

The Duchess smiled slowly into his eyes, and moved towards him in a fashion peculiar to herself, not walking, floating rather.

"Anne, you are not changed—you are not changed at all. You are just as I have thought of you. You are my angel. You came—you did not forget—I have been so ill, have suffered so. Ah, you are adorable!"

With nervous eagerness he drew her to the sofa beside him, and sat looking into her face, delightedly noting every feature, every shining hair tendril, counting the very breaths that passed her lips. Madame, who had known him so well in the old days, who thought of him always as one much younger than herself, ran her fingers through his dark hair, smoothed the forehead that was so hot, and insisted on his lying down again. This being accomplished, she seated herself near him, one of his hands fast holding hers, his eyes smiling up at her.

"You know my story—that I am nothing, now, François?" she asked.

"I know only that you are my angel, Anne. What more could I wish?"

Thus this first visit passed off to the highest satisfaction of madame. D'Agenois had always pleased her, was ever obedient to her way of thinking, was singularly unselfish and unsuspicious, and his blind devotion to her was perhaps the only reason why she did not care for him as she had seemed to care for Louis of France. The young Duke was, moreover, still far from well; and la Châteauroux was enough of a woman to have a taste for humoring a patient who threw himself, utterly regardless of consequences, upon her mercy. The first, then, became the beginning of an infinite series of visits, none of which was short. Madame had not been in Paris a week before she discovered that nothing but the boldest possible course was open to her now. The story of her dismissal from Metz, exaggerated in every way, was discussed from palace to fish-market. She was pointed out in the streets and accosted with insulting remarks. The *haute bour-*

geoisie itself sneered at her, and as for the *noblesse*, those who in the old days had schemed for weeks to obtain an invitation to her salon, could now have seen the moons of Saturn with the naked eye more easily than they would behold Mme. de Châteauroux in her chair. Mme. de Mailly-Nesle refused to admit either sister to her *hôtel*. Henri at intervals went to the Rue du Bac out of duty, not pleasure. Mme. de Tencin, while she frequently summoned both sisters to her side when she was alone, was always singularly unable to receive Madame la Duchesse during one of her evenings. Of all the former friends and sycophants, Victorine de Coigny was the single person who allowed herself to be seen in all places, at all hours, with the deposed favorite, without finding her popularity thereby lessened. But the little Maréchale was a peculiar case. It was her rôle to be unusual, unconventional; and this one thing added to her *risqué* list could not harm her. Even had there been danger in it, Victorine would have clung to the other woman, for the sake of their old friendship. But Victorine had a rash nature.

Amid her little turmoil Marie Anne moved with apparent serenity. Certainly her world, what part of it was still in Paris, must at first have suspected the pangs of mortification that they daily caused her. But, so far as outward evidence was concerned, there was none. A woman who had had the wit and the unscrupulous fortitude to attain to the position once occupied by Marie Anne de Mailly-Nesle, possessed enough strength of character to accept the circumstances attendant on her fall with excellent philosophy. She was the talk of all Paris, of Versailles, and of Sceaux. Her attitude was unceasingly watched and commented on; and, after two weeks, a new idea began to dawn in the various salons. It was the startling one that madame had found a new string for her straightened bow. The idea originated when, one evening at the Hôtel du Tours, the discovery was made that five people, on five consecutive days, had seen the chair of Mme. de Châteauroux waiting in the Rue de l'Evêque at the door of the d'Aginois *hôtel*.

Three of these people, moreover, had seen her herself issue from the *hôtel* door, had refused recognition to her, and gone their ways. The salon of M. Vauvenargues gasped. What a plan of action! How daring! How truly like the whilom favorite! Was she in love with him, after all? What were the arms of Châteauroux and d'Agenois? Were the quarterings harmonious? By the middle of September the wedding was discussed as a surety, and many a grande dame wondered if she might not throw hauteur to the winds and go. Who would not wish to study the bridal dress? And then—after—question of questions!—what would accrue when his Majesty returned? The salons gasped again, wondered, and waited.

Matters also waited for some time. There occurred one of those aggravatingly hopeless stand-stills when society purfled and shrugged and created fireless smoke at a rate which science could not easily measure. No wedding announcement was made; neither did his Majesty return to Paris. Fribourg had proved to be a city possessed of rather better resources of defence than the Court before its walls had of amusement. After two weeks of cannonading and unsuccessful sorties on the part of the besieged, the Court grew very bored indeed, and most of the ladies followed her Majesty back to France. If the Queen had wished to stay longer at Louis' side, she did not voice the wish, for her husband entertained a different notion. Among the few departing gentlemen was a certain M. Lenormand d'Etiolles, a nonentity to history, who very joyfully accompanied his wife away from the occasional sight of his Majesty, to an estate at Meudon, where madame deigned to reside for one month.

The last siege of the campaign was at last triumphantly concluded on the 28th day of October, and three days later came the first rumor of the King's approaching return to Paris. France received the news with hysterical joy. It was odd, considering his ways, how universally adored throughout his youth this King was. To his people he was a warrior hero. And, indeed, his personality,

since the first time that he had appeared in public, in a golden robe one yard long, with violet leading-strings about his little shoulders, had been beautiful enough to inspire worship. The portraits of his old age are hideous enough; but that of Vanloo, which the great painter declared he could not do justice to, is the one which should stand out above all others as the true picture of this King of lotus-eaters. Preparations were made to give his Majesty, and what of the army was with him, a magnificent reception. An evening procession was arranged, during which all Paris and her river were literally to roll in fire. The Faubourg St. Antoine turned out *en masse* for the occasion, and, stranger still, not a noble in the city but contributed certain louis d'or for fireworks, and arranged windows and a party to view the procession.

Mme. de Châteauroux was addressed by no one on the subject of these preparations. The royal coach would pass neither the Rue du Bac nor the Rue de l'Evêque. Mme. de Mailly-Nesle did not dream of asking her sister-in-law to sit at her windows overlooking the Pont Royal, which Louis must cross on his way to the Tuileries. But even had the invitation been given, the Duchess would have refused it. It was not in her plan that the King should find her face among those of the throng; but eagerly she prayed that its absence might be felt.

"François, upon the 13th of November I shall stay all day here with you. Nay, better, you shall come to me, and I will serve you such a little supper as—"

"Anne! Who could touch food in thy presence?"

Madame smiled at him, and they ceased to speak. They could sit silent now for uncounted minutes, madame knowing every thought that flitted through the brain of the young man; d'Aginois fancying, perhaps, that he knew as much of the Duchess. If this were not so, what mattered it? He was supremely happy. He had lost all jealousy, even of royalty, for he willingly believed what she told him with every look: that she loved him, only, at last.

At the time of their short conversation relative to the

home-coming of the King, they were in the Hôtel d'Agenois, returned half an hour before from a drive. The Duke lay upon a couch, idly watching his companion, who sat toying with a bit of *découpure*, her back to the windows, a soft light falling upon her hair and shoulders. It had been a quiet half-hour, and madame was beginning to be tired. She was contemplating a return to her own *hôtel*, when an interruption occurred. Some one was admitted below. Some one came hurriedly up-stairs, and Mme. de Lauraguais, unannounced, ran into the room.

"My dear Elise! Your breath is quite gone! Is there a fire—a scandal—a death?"

"None of them. Wait!" She sank into a chair to regain her breath, while François sounded a gong, intending to order wine.

"It is only Henri, who sends us an urgent note to come at once to his *hôtel*. I received it, and came for you. The coach is outside. He sent it."

Madame shrugged. "What startling thing can have happened?" she said, smiling. "Perhaps Laure is dying, and wishes for me. However, I come."

And, after a gentle farewell for the day to d'Agenois, madame went. The Mailly-Nesle coach bore the two ladies at a rapid pace across the Rue St. Honoré, out upon the quay and on to the Pont Royal, on the opposite side of which, just across from the Théatins, was the Hôtel de Mailly. During the drive the sisters scarcely spoke. Mme. de Châteauroux certainly did not seem curious as to the reason for Henri's imperative summons. To tell the truth, she was not thinking of it. She was finishing a dream.

Henri himself met them at his door, smiled at Marie Anne's languid greeting, refused to reply to the eager question of Elise, but conducted them rapidly up-stairs into the grand salon. Here stood the Marquise, Henri's wife, with two people, a man and a woman. As she caught sight of the man's face, Mme. de Châteauroux gave a little cry, and turned suddenly colorless.

"Claudel!" she said.

Claude came forward, raising her hand to his lips, and saluting Mme. de Lauraguais, who was staring at him as at one raised from the dead.

Then de Mailly went back, and took the woman by the hand. A slight, straight, girlish figure she had, a fair complexion, and a pair of large grayish eyes, that were presently lifted to the face of la Châteauroux.

"Anne," said Claude, quietly, "let me make known to you my wife."

"Your wife!"

Deborah, with rather a pathetic little smile, courtesied low.

CHAPTER III

November Thirteenth



IT was thus that Claude brought home his wife. Two months before he had been married to her in Dr. Carroll's chapel by Aimé St. Quentin, with all Annapolis to witness; and next day he left America on the *Baltimore*, in company with Deborah, and her very modest little travelling coffer. Truly bridal weather was theirs. The skies were fair, seas calmly blue, and continuous light western winds, sent by the very gods themselves, carried them straight to the English coast. All told, they were on the ship but six weeks—six strange, half-terrible weeks to the colonial girl. She was learning to know her husband, and he her. In a way, not always, but by spells, Deborah was happy. She loved the sea, and she grew to be very fond of the ship, clinging to it during the last days of the voyage as she had not clung to her far Maryland home. She had become dimly apprehensive of the life into which she was going, of which Claude had lately told her so much more than he could do during their comradeship in Annapolis. He also made her speak with him much in the French tongue, which she did readily enough at first, in a manner caught from St. Quentin, her first instructor. But when it came to using no English, to hearing none from Claude, her tongue faltered, and she would remain silent for hours at a time rather than appear awkward before him. Claude was very gentle. He made her finally understand, however, how much easier it would be for her to make mistakes now, than to do so in the land to which they were going. He told her

the story of Marie Leczinska, who had acquired all her knowledge of the language of her adopted country from a waiting-maid who spoke a Provençal patois, and how the Queen was ridiculed by all the Court till she studied secretly, many hours a day, with her confessor, and was now, when she chose to exert herself, one of the most excellent linguists in France. So Deborah took heart, and tried more bravely, until, by the time they had crossed the English Channel and landed in Calais, none but a close observer could have found a flaw in her ordinary conversation.

Claude de Mailly himself passed a very contented six weeks on the Atlantic. A day or two after his marriage the realization of that marriage, its haste, its rashness, its short-sightedness, the fact that his wife had not one drop of blue blood in her veins, came over him in such a wave that he was half drowned. What was it that he had done? Who was he carrying back with him to the most fastidious, the most critical Court in Christendom? A bourgeois! A Provençal! A child! And Claude, with angry, anxious injustice, for three days avoided his wife, and barely saw her except at meals. The thing that re-attracted his attention to her was the fact that, during this time, Deborah never made the slightest attempt to force her presence upon him. If she were unhappy, he did not know it. He never saw her weep; he heard no word of complaint. And this unusual thing piqued his interest. On the fourth morning he found her sitting alone in the stern of the vessel, gazing back at the western horizon with far-off eyes. Seating himself beside her, he leaned over and took one of her hands in his. She turned towards him instantly, looked at him for a moment, and then drew it quietly away.

"You needn't do that," she said.

And then it was that Claude knew how glad he was to do it—to have the right to do it. And thereupon he threw care to the winds and became her slave. He, too, regretted the end of the voyage, when it came. Nevertheless, he had, in the past, suffered severely from homesickness, and

Paris, Versailles, Henri, Elise, and, more than all of them together, his other cousin, were constantly in his mind. He dreamed and talked of them when he slept, and, if Deborah had been proficient enough in French to make out the half-coherent sentences that passed her husband's lips at night, she would probably have learned still more about her approaching life in this way.

Unquestionably, Deborah dreaded the new life. She had reason to; not alone because of the natural shyness attendant on a country girl's first appearance at a great Court. She knew that Claude's whole existence was bound up there. She believed that he cared rather more than he actually did about this life that she had never lived. In consequence, upon the drive of several days from Calais to Paris, Deborah grew more and more silent, more and more definitely apprehensive, with each new stage. On the evening of November 8th they arrived at Issy, and there spent the night. Next morning Claude rose with the sun, some time before Deborah even awoke. He went outside of their post-house and walked delightedly through the familiar streets, listening to his own language spoken with his own accent on every hand, discovering well-known shops and buildings, and returning in the highest spirits to Deborah at nine o'clock. They had their chocolate and rolls together, Deborah eating little and silently, Claude jesting and laughing continually till she was roused out of her apathy by his thoughtlessness towards her. It was not, however, till they were rolling along the Paris road that she spoke—in English:

"Well, Claude, you have brought your Madame the Countess home to the King. He'll be satisfied, I hope."

Apparently both the allusion and the bitterness were lost upon him. He only answered with a bright smile: "I am satisfied, my Deborah. What the King thinks is not my concern. Oh, I had not told you, had I?—that the King is not here. He is coming home with the army next Saturday, the 13th, from Strasbourg. You know he has been fighting all summer. They are going

to give him a triumph on his return. There will be a procession through the street, and the King will ride in it. You will see him then, Deborah. Shall you like it all?"

"I—don't know. I never saw a king," responded the girl, interested in spite of herself in the anticipation of these hitherto scarcely dreamed-of glories.

At half-past eleven o'clock their chaise passed the barrier, and they rolled down the narrow street towards the river, in Paris at last. Claude himself was quiet now. He was a little anxious; he could not be sure just what he should find "at home." Moreover, the familiar streets and sounds no longer raised his spirits. Instead, they came so near to bringing tears to his eyes, that he was relieved when Deborah asked:

"Where are we going? To another inn?"

"I am not sure. I have directed the man to the Hôtel de Mailly. But, if no one is there, we must go to an inn. Look, Deborah, there is the Seine, there is the Pont Royal, and there, just ahead, is Henri's house, where we are going. Are you glad—little one?"

It was half-past ten o'clock that night before Claude and his wife were again alone together. They had left the salon thus early through weariness, leaving the rest of the family party to disband as it would. Neither the Count nor Deborah spoke till the suite of apartments assigned them on the second floor had been gained and the door to their antechamber closed. Deborah was going on to what she supposed must be their bedroom, when Claude caught her hand.

"Surely you are going to say good-night?" he asked, smiling.

"*Good-night!* Why—I don't understand," she said, quickly.

Of a sudden the smile left Claude's face. He had not thought of this before. "There, Debby, is your room—on this side is mine. A maid whom Mme. de Mailly-Nesle has kindly lent you is waiting for you. Henri's

valet is there—where I sleep. We do not occupy the same room. It—it is not the custom. Therefore sit here with me for a few moments, and tell me—how you like them all—my family?”

Deborah stared at him in bewilderment during the explanation; but, true to her nature, she accepted it without comment, permitting herself to be drawn down upon the little sofa where he sat, and passively leaving her hands in his.

“Tell me now—do you like them?”

Deborah hesitated. “What mistakes did I make?” she asked, finally.

“Not one, my Deborah, save that you were not insolent enough.”

She smiled faintly. “I like Monsieur le Marquis.”

“And he you! Yes, you must love him for my sake. He is more than my brother. And his wife?”

“Is she his wife, Claude? Why does he always call her madame? Why did you call me madame? And she treated him so—so formally.”

“*Parbleu!* you are right; they do not know each other very well, else she could hardly help loving him; and she would not be so bourgeois as that! Do you like her? She was kinder to you, Debby, than I have ever seen her to any woman. Answer me—dost like her?”

“Yes—I liked her. She never looked at me when she spoke, and she scarcely spoke to any one else.”

“True. She does not approve them. But Elise—Mme. de Lauraguais—”

“Yes, she is very pleasant, and a little pretty, too.”

“And now—now—you met Mme. de Châteauroux. What do you think of her?” Claude asked the question firmly, after a struggle with himself.

Deborah turned crimson, and started to rise from her place, but de Mailly gently held her back. He would have his answer; and it was given him. After all, he had married a woman, and one whose feelings, though often unexpressed, were none the less acute. She voiced them now.

"Claude—I hate her! She is not pretty. Her face is hideous! She was rude to me, to her sister, to the Marquise, to every one but you. And you sat beside her almost the whole afternoon. Ah! I cannot bear her! Mme. de Mailly told me why she was in Paris, how she had been made to leave the King. Claude, are you not ashamed that she is of your blood?"

Deborah was on her feet now, and flung her words straight at her husband. He sat silent, quite still, rather pale, through the outburst. After it he did not answer her question, but only murmured to himself, "Why do women so seldom like her?" Then, looking up at his wife, he said, kindly:

"Deborah, you know that I have always been fond of my cousin. I—have been very proud of her. So have we all. Was it unnatural that she should wish to talk with me after we had been separated for so long?"

Deborah jerked her head impatiently. "I do not like her," she reiterated, with dogged displeasure.

Claude rose, with a faint sigh. "Your French was wonderfully good. I was very pleased, dear. To-morrow—you shall have some costumes ordered. Naturally, yours are a little ancient in mode. Good-night."

"Good-night."

He kissed her upon the forehead, and would have turned away, but that suddenly she flung her arms about his neck passionately, and, raising her lips to his ear, whispered: "Claude—Claude—I am a stranger here. You are all I have of—the old life. Be—be kind to me."

It was almost the first emotion that he had ever seen her display, and his heart was warm as he took her tenderly into his arms again, whispering such words as only lovers know. Five minutes later Deborah crept away to her room happier than she had been before upon the soil of France; and not even the somewhat terrifying stiffness of madame's maid, nor the loneliness of this strange room, had power to banish the memory of her husband's good-night.

The four succeeding days passed both rapidly and

slowly. From late morning till late night Deborah's hours were filled. She and Claude were to remain at the Hôtel de Mailly till the return of the King, after which they would take an apartment in Versailles. For the purpose of selecting one, they went together to the little city on Thursday. In the Rue Anjou, near the pièce des Suisses, they discovered a very pretty abode in the second floor of a house—rooms once occupied by the Chevalier de Rohan, of duelistic fame, furnished and hung in perfect taste, with precisely the number of rooms desired. Then Deborah went to see the monstrous, silent palace and park; after which she and Claude dined together at a café in the open air, quite *à la bourgeois*, somewhat to the unspoken apprehension of Claude, who was not pleased with the unconventional affair, which, however, unduly delighted his wife. They returned to Paris in the early evening by coach, well satisfied with the day. To Deborah's consternation, Claude next engaged a maid for her, a woman whom she was supposed to command at will, who was to dress and undress her, arrange her coiffure in the absence of the regular hair-dresser, care for her wardrobe, and conduct madame's affairs of the heart with discretion. To the little Countess's great delight, however, her first person in this line left her service after three days, for the reason that Mme. de Mailly seemed too devoted to monsieur the husband, and, in consequence, there were no chances for fees of secrecy such as she was accustomed to count upon as among her perquisites of office. By the time of their removal to Versailles, another attendant had been found who pleased her mistress better. Julie was lively, young, rather pretty, and not long from the provinces. If her modes for hair and panniers were not so Parisian as those of her predecessor, at least she and young Mme. de Mailly took a fancy to each other from the first, and Deborah was more than content. Meantime Claude had happily discovered and re-engaged his former valet, and thus, with the addition of a chef and scullion and two lackeys, their little *ménage* would be complete. Before all these

matters were arranged, however, the Marquise de Mailly-Nesle, who had taken an unaccountable fancy to Claude's wife, accompanied Deborah to a milliner, to whom was intrusted the task of preparing a wardrobe for the Countess. Deborah watched the selections with delight and a secret consternation. Could Claude afford such things, and such an infinite variety of them? Finally, unable to hold her peace about the matter, she drew the Marquise one side, and stammered out the question of prices with pretty embarrassment.

"Mon Dieu! child, why should I ask prices? If the bill is reasonable, be assured that Claude will pay. If it is too large—pouf!—he will refuse to look at it! That is all. Do not be alarmed."

Deborah, surprised and disturbed, felt that she must stop proceedings at once, for the Maryland school of economy had been strict. But a shimmering blue satin, with cloth of silver for petticoat, and ruffles of Venice point, was now under consideration. Blue was her own color. She had never worn satin in her life—and dearly she loved its enticing swish. Why, unless Claude forbade, should she refuse it? And Claude did not forbid. When she confessed her doubts during their anteroom conference that evening, he laughed at her, cried that she should live in blue satin if she chose, and asked what she was to wear on the morrow at the royal procession.

"Oh—it is something that madame got at once—white silk brocaded with pink flowers, and a petticoat with lace. And I am to have a lace cap with pink ribbons."

"Charming—and good-night. Sleep late to-morrow, in preparation."

Upon this Saturday, the 13th of November, Paris did not wake up until afternoon. By two o'clock, however, St. Antoine had left its domicile and was dispersing itself in unkempt groups along those streets which, as it had been posted, his Majesty would ride through in his triumphant home-coming, on his way to the Tuileries. Marie Leczinska and the Dauphin spent the morning in prayer, and

were off together, after a hurried dinner, to join their lord at the southeastern barrier. On the previous day Louis had been at Meaux, but left that town in the afternoon, and spent the night at no great distance from Paris. To tell the truth, he was not too well pleased at the information that his metropolis was desirous of giving him a heroic welcome. Certainly his title of *bien-aimé* was anything but his own choice. Nothing bored him so thoroughly as affection taken in the abstract. All through his early life he seemed to be unfortunate in having about him people to whom he was totally indifferent, yet who persisted in blindly worshipping him. In the case of his wife, it had not always been so. As a boy he had been devoted to her. But for the Dauphin, with his Jesuitical manners and phrases for all occasions, his father had never pretended to care. The daughters were more amusing. This afternoon Louis would have been very well pleased to see them when her Majesty's coach came up with the royal staff, in the midst of which Louis sat on horseback. The Queen, after alighting, stood looking at her husband with wistful yearning; but young France, dropping on one knee in a dry spot in the road, cried out, with very good expression:

"Sire, regard me as the representative of that nation which, with tears of devotion and thanksgiving, greets its Father, its Hero, and its King!"

There was a little pause. Then Louis remarked, casually, "You will catch cold without your hat, child," after which he turned to one of his marshals with some remark upon the day.

How the Dauphin arose from his knee is not recorded.

Like all much-prepared-for cavalcades, this one was slow in starting. His Majesty objected to the length of the route planned. He was anxious to be at home again; and he was tired of people. Had somebody sent for his turning-lathe? He would do a bit of work when he reached the Tuileries. Why could not Richelieu take his place as representative, and let him get quietly through the city in a public coach? It was nearly dark now. Only

after an endless series of expostulations was he at last persuaded to conform to the wishes of his people, and show himself in all the real beauty of his manhood.

Paris had waited very patiently through the bleak November afternoon, shivering and laughing in anticipation of its pleasure. Now the windows of every house along the way were gleaming with candles and dotted with heads. On either side of the street torches began to be lighted among the standing throngs. Presently, as the heavy twilight fell lower, officers of the police began, here and there, to illumine the long chains of lanterns that were strung along the walls of houses, and, at short intervals, across the streets; for Paris would admit no night yet. Every now and then, down among the standing throngs, dashed the coach of some nobleman on the way to his own view-point. The drivers of these vehicles took no heed of the people in their paths. They were allowed to scramble away as best they might, or left to be crushed beneath the horses' hoofs if they chose. No one murmured, for the affair was quite usual.

By half-past five o'clock a goodly company was assembled in the salons of Mme. de Mailly-Nesle; ladies who, in their eagerness to behold the return of their King, were very willing to forget the fact that they had ever failed to recognize the Marquise, for reasons connected with a relative Duchess. Upon their arrival at their hostess' *hôtel* they found awaiting them a new sensation in the person of Claude, and a two-weeks' subject of gossip and discussion in Claude's foreign wife.

Deborah, arrayed in her brocade, her rebellious hair fastened stiffly in place with a thousand pins, the enormous hoops of her overdress annoying her as much as possible, patches and powder upon her face and hair, with the customary rouge on her cheeks, stood beside Victorine de Coigny, the only new-comer with whom she did not feel ill at ease. Mesdames de Mirepoix, Rohan, and Châtelet stared at her unceasingly, found her dress in good style, and her face, on the whole, not bad. L'Abbé

de Bernis, who, to Henri's fruitless rage, had accompanied Victorine hither, looked upon Deborah approvingly. As to Claude, he did not approach his wife, but he watched her, quietly, from wherever he chanced to be, involuntarily admiring her presence, but undeniably dreading possible *faux pas*. Of these there had been as yet no signs. Deborah certainly was frightened, but she did not show it. Obeying her husband's last behest, she kept her head well up and her eyes on a level with those of the person to whom she talked. Mme. de Coigny, lively, good-natured, bored, but never supercilious, conversed with the little Countess for some moments upon her journey, upon Paris, and upon the return of the King. Deborah bravely answered her questions, and, less uncertain of her French than she had been a week ago, even hazarded a few remarks of her own with which the little Maréchale seemed pleased. Their *tête-à-tête*, however, was checked in its early stages by the beginning of a general conversation opened by one of the *dames d'étiquette*, Mme. de Rohan, who cried to her hostess, from across the room:

"Truly, Mme. de Nesle, you have here all the world but two people."

"And who are those?" responded the Marquise, graciously, while the salon grew suddenly quiet.

"Those?—why, the Duc d'Angenois and your cousin, Mme. de Châteauroux. Where, if one may ask, are they?"

There was a vaguely indefinite murmur of interest from every part of the room. Then from la Mirepoix came another remark, one such as only she was capable of making: "M. de Mailly—oh, I mean the Count—you were formerly always cognizant of the whereabouts of the dear Duchess. Can you not inform us of them now?"

The company lifted its brow and a dozen glances were cast at Deborah—this new little creature from the Americas. "She does not comprehend the allusion," was the general thought, when they saw her attitude of large-eyed, inattentive innocence. Only Claude, as he came forward a little, snuff-box in hand, turned white.

"Ah, Madame la Maréchale, you speak of by-gone days. I know the engagements of Mme. de Châteauroux? Impossible! Am I my cousin's keeper?"

"Perhaps," murmured the Marquise de Châtelet, sweetly, "she is to form part of his Majesty's escort."

Silence followed this remark. Mme. de Rohan glared with displeasure at her companion, and the Marquise flushed a little beneath her rouge. It was too much, for once. Mme. de Mailly-Nesle, with commendable haste, turned to her near neighbor and reinstated the *tête-à-têtes*.

"Ah!" murmured Mme. de Coigny to Deborah, "these *dames d'étiquette* are insufferable. They should be stricken with a plague!"

Deborah smiled very faintly, and could make no reply. One of her hands was tightly clenched. Otherwise she appeared unconcerned enough.

At this moment M. de Bernis, having decided the new Countess to be rather presentable at a distance, drew nearer, with intent to converse with her. The abbé was, to-day, in his clerical dress, and thus Deborah acknowledged Mme. de Coigny's introduction with great gravity. When Victorine presently turned aside to Coyer, de Bernis began his conversation:

"Come to the window, here, madame, and look at the crowd upon the quay. In your country I dare swear you have no such *canaille*."

"Poor things! How dirty and ragged they look in all the light," murmured Deborah, in English.

"You should one day drive through the Faubourg where they live; it would interest you," returned the abbé, in the same tongue.

Deborah looked at him with a quick smile. "English sounds very dear to me. Thank you vastly for speaking it."

"One would learn Sanscrit to gain a word of praise from your lips, madame," was the abbé's unnecessary reply, whispered, not spoken.

The young girl was embarrassed. How could a priest say such things? Turning her head uneasily, she found

Mme. de Coigny close to her, and beheld a new expression on that childlike, fretful face. It was as well that, at this moment, the distant shouting of the throng proclaimed the advance of the royal procession. Under cover of the general hastening to the lantern-hung windows, Victorine took occasion to murmur in de Bernis' ear:

"Why are you always cruel, François? Why will you continually torture me so? This child, now! Have pity on her."

De Bernis shrugged impatiently. "You are silly, Victorine. It is not my fault that you are jealous every time I speak to a woman."

They were silent for a moment. Then Mme. de Coigny, as she stared into the torchlit street below, sighed. "Those faces—the rags—the dirt—François, do they not remind you of our first days together in the Court of Miracles?"

For reply the abbé silently kissed her hand.

All of Mme. de Mailly-Nesle's guests were by this time arranged in the windows along the front of the *hôtel*. Claude, escaping from the women who would have questioned his heart away, sought Deborah's side. She received him with a friendly little smile that relieved him of many fears. A silence of expectation had fallen now over the room, for the distant sounds of shouting and cheering were increasing in clearness.

To his intense relief, Louis' long ride was nearly over; and, almost at its end, when there should remain only a bridge to be crossed to the Tuileries, he was hoping for something that should repay him for all his sacrifice of time and comfort. Since the day of the dismissal from Metz the name of la Châteauroux had never crossed the King's lips. But silence is not indicative of forgetfulness. On the contrary, with every passing day Louis felt his life more intolerably lonely, in the absence of her for whom he really cared more than any one else. Now, as he drew near to the Hôtel de Mailly, which he knew well, expectation and hope increased his speed, and he passed the Théatins at a lively trot.

"See, Deborah, here is the royal regiment. Those, there, at the head, just coming under the lights, are the marshals—ay, that is Coigny!"

"Madame, your husband," murmured de Bernis in Victorine's ear.

"—And there are the Court pages in uniform, look—on the white horses—Richelieu, d'Epéron, de Gêvres, de Mouhy, Trudaine—Heavens, how familiar they all are! And here is the Queen's coach. *Voilà!* She looked out just then, at the shouts. The Dauphin is with her—they would not let the child ride. He's all of fifteen now—is he not, de Bernis? And *now*, Deborah—there, alone—in front of the corps—with the torches around him—that is the King."

Deborah Travis bent her head forward towards the window till the light from the lantern that hung above her shone full in her face. In the street, directly below, she beheld a great sorrel charger caparisoned in white and silver, bearing a rider also in white, with laced coat, cloth breeches, shining black riding-boots, white hat *à la Garde Française*, and across his breast a wide blue ribbon, fastened with three orders. The eyes of Claude's wife flashed over the figure and to the face, which was markedly distinct in the light of the torches.

"Is that the *King?*" she whispered to herself, unconscious of speaking.

At the instant that Louis passed beneath the string of lamps across the way, Deborah's eyes fell upon his bright blue ones. As though she possessed magnetic power, the King responded to the look. It was not the face that he had hoped to find here, but it was one—as fair. The royal hat came off, the royal figure bent to the saddle-bow. And then he was gone. Deborah's cheeks were redder than her rouge. Every woman in the room had turned to look at her, but some eyes, perhaps, stopped at sight of Claude. His face was deathly, and upon it was plainly written new, quickening dread; while both of his white hands were tightly clenched over his polished nails,

CHAPTER IV

Claude's Own



THE *Nouvelles à la Main* of the 15th of November announced, among many things, that the Count and Countess de Mailly had entered their apartment in the Rue d'Anjou at Versailles. Deborah, who for some time had been secretly caressing the thought of "home," went into the little suite of rooms with a glorified, colonial sense of mistress-ship. Madam Trevor's method of housekeeping was familiar to her in every detail, from candle-dipping to the frying of chickens; and, while she felt rather helpless, having no slaves at her command, she determined to do what she could with the two liveried lackeys, and to demand others of Claude if she found it necessary. She and Claude had never discussed housekeeping together, for the reason that Claude had no conception of the meaning of the word.

They arrived and were served with dinner in their little abode on Monday. Tuesday afternoon found Deborah seated helplessly in the boudoir, with her husband, rather pale and nervous, before her. He had found her, utterly oblivious of the consternation of the chef, the lackeys, and the scullion, washing Chinese porcelain teacups in the kitchen. And it was then that Deborah received her first lesson in French great-ladyhood, by whose iron laws all her housewifely instincts were to be bound about and imprisoned. She must never give an order relative to the management of their *ménage*. She must never purchase or arrange a single article of food that was to be prepared for their table. She must never dream of performing

the smallest act of manual labor. She might designate the hour for meals, or inform the first lackey how many were to be served, or what beverage should be passed at her toilette. She might keep her appointments with costumers, milliners, hair-dressers, furriers, jewellers, toy-men; and she might see that her engagement-book was filled. That was *all* that was expected of her in the way of labor. She had made a great false step to-day, and it must not occur again.

And Deborah listened to Claude's explanation in silence, with her pretty new world all tumbling about her ears.

"We might, then, as well have stayed at your cousin's house. This is only our tavern, kept for our convenience," she said, at last.

Claude nodded, and paid no attention to the sarcasm. "This is where we sleep, where we change our clothes, where we receive our friends."

"We've no home?"

"On the contrary, we make all Paris, all Versailles, our home."

Deborah folded her hands, and her face grew suddenly helpless in expression. "I don't like it," she said, faintly.

"Dear, you do not know it. Wait. You will soon be too much occupied to think of it. Why is your coffer still here? Has not Julie unpacked it? You must not permit laziness."

"She has done all that I would allow. I will finish it myself. Claude, may I have something?"

"What? You shall have it."

"You know in our salon there is, near the mantel, a little cabinet against the wall—a little cabinet with two shelves, and a door and key."

"Yes, yes. 'Tis for liqueurs, if we want to keep them. Well?"

"I want that—I want the cabinet to use for myself."

"Just Heaven! Have you then so many valuables, or so many secrets?" He laughed, but there was curiosity also in his tone.

"You know that I have neither, Claude. But I want the cabinet."

Claude shrugged, never dreaming what she intended the place for. It was but a little thing to ask; and besides, curiously enough, Claude, who had been brought up among the most unreliable class of women in the world, had yet been so little affected by their ways that, ten weeks after their marriage, he was beginning to trust his wife. She was as honest as a man when she did not like a thing, or when she wanted one; she was not talkative; she did not make scenes; he had beheld her angry, but it was not with a malicious anger; and, more than all, she never complained. So far Claude had found nothing to regret in his marriage. He realized it now as he stood there in her dressing-room, while she sat looking at him expectantly.

"Eh, well—the cabinet and its key are yours. You'll not forget what I have been telling you this afternoon?"

"No."

He smiled again, went to her side and kissed her. "Good-bye, then. I am going out. You will not be lonely? Mme. de Coigny may come. After your presentation to the Queen, you know, there will be no idle moments."

He left her with a little nod and smile, and, donning hat and cloak, departed towards the Avenue de Sceaux, from which he turned into the Rue des Chaniers, bound for a little building at the end of it, not far from the deer-park, which was much in favor as an afternoon assembling place for gentlemen of the Court during the unoccupied hours of the afternoon. Here one might gamble as he chose, high or low; drink coffee, rum, or *vin d'Ai*; fight his duel, if need be; or peruse an account of the last one in a paper, if he did not want to talk. It was a comfortable and ugly little place, kept by M. Berkley, of fame somewhat undesirable in London, but of gracious personality here.

To-day, for the first time in months, the little place was creditably filled with its customary patrons, noblemen and lords to whom camp-life had lately become more familiar than the Court. Here were assembled all those gentlemen

who, two days ago, had ridden into Paris with Louis; and a good many more who mysteriously reappeared out of the depths of lower Paris, where they had been hidden from salon gossip and too many women. That morning Richelieu, d'Epéron, and de Gèvres left the Tuileries in despair. The King, clad in a stout leathern suit, was shut into an empty room with his friend the carpenter, making snuff-boxes with all his might, and admitting neither silk, velvet, his wife, nor the Dauphin into his presence. His gentlemen were now less harmlessly occupied. De Gèvres was opposing d'Epéron on the red. Richelieu, in a mood, played *solitaire à la* Charles VI. against himself, the sums that he lost being vowed to go to Mlle. Nicolet of the Opéra ballet. De Mouhy, d'Argenson, de Coigny, de Rohan, Maurepas, Jarnac, and half a dozen others were grouped about the room, drinking, betting, and gossiping. The conversation turned, as it was some time bound to do, on la Châteauroux and d'Agenois.

"The King has not yet, I believe, discovered the renewed relationship," drawled d'Epéron, mildly.

"Perhaps not. But in a week—imagine it! Madame la Duchesse is fortunate in having gentlemen scattered over most of the civilized world on whom she may cast herself for protection in case of need!" returned Richelieu, crossing glances with Maurepas.

There was a little round of significant looks and nods. Evidently the Duke's *sang-froid* had not deserted him. Every one knew very well that the deposed favorite and her former preceptor were soon bound to be at opposite ends of the scales, and that her rise now meant his fall.

"I wonder—" began Coigny, thoughtfully, when again, for the twentieth time, the door opened, and some one entered whose appearance paralyzed the conversation.

"Well, gentlemen, I am thankful only that I am not a *débutante* at the Opéra. Such a reception would ruin me. Am I forgotten?"

"*Forgotten!*" It was a chorus. Then one voice con-

tinued: "When one sees a ghost, Claude, one fears to address it hastily. It might take offence."

"I think it is a weakness of mine eyes that shapes—"

"This monstrous apparition'? Thanks, truly!" observed de Mailly.

Richelieu then strode forward and seized his hand. "He's in the flesh, messieurs. I am delighted, I am charmed, I am somewhat overcome, dear Claude. I should have pictured you at this moment flirting in Spain, storming a seraglio at Constantinople, toasting some estimable *fräulein* in beer, drowning yourself in tea and accent in London, or—fighting savages in the West. Anything but this! Your exile is over, then?"

Claude smiled, but, before he spoke, Maurepas had come forward:

"My faith, gentlemen, you seem to be but slightly informed of the last news. Monsieur has been in Paris for a week with Madame the Countess his wife, and—"

"His wife! *Diable!*"

"Come, come, then, I was not far wrong. Is she Spanish, Turkish, German, English, or—by some impossible chance—French? Speak!"

"I have not before had the chance, my lord," returned Claude, bowing. "However, my tale is not so wonderful. When I went upon my little journey the King was so gracious as to express the hope that I would return to Versailles when I should be able to present to him madame my wife. Well—in the English Americas I was so happy as—to have engaged the affections of a charming daughter of their excellent aristocracy there. We were married nearly three months ago in a private chapel by the Father Aimé St. Quentin; and so, madame being pleased to return with me to Court, we set sail shortly after the wedding, and—behold me!"

"Bravo—bravo! You have been making history! Madame, of course, is not yet presented?"

"Scarcely, Chevalier, since her Majesty is barely returned."

"Are you stopping in Paris?"

"We have Rohan's former apartment in the Rue d'Anjou here."

"Aha! Madame possibly brought a worthy *dot*—is it not so?"

If the question displeased Claude, he did not show it. Shrugging and smiling with some significance, he moved towards a card-table, and instantly the estimate of Mme. de Mailly's prestige went up a hundred thousand livres. The room was now all attention to Claude. He ordered cognac, and his example was followed by a dozen others. De Gêvres and d'Epéron ceased their play. Even Richelieu seemed for a moment to be on the point of leaving the interests of Mlle. Nicolet, but eventually he continued his amusement, only stopping occasionally to glance around at the group of new sycophants, biding his own time.

"Of course, you have seen la Châteauroux, Claude?" questioned Rohan, a little intimately.

De Mailly stared at him. "Of course, as you say, I have seen her."

"D'Agenois' reign will be short, then," muttered Coigny to Maurepas.

Claude heard, flushed, and turned again to Rohan: "Chevalier, will you dice?"

"With pleasure."

Cups were produced, and the rest began betting among themselves on the outcome of the first throws. Odds were not in Rohan's favor.

"A thousand louis, Chevalier, that my number is less than yours."

This was an unusual stake. Rohan's eyebrows twitched up once, but he took the wager calmly. Deborah's reputed fortune went up another hundred thousand francs, and advanced still further when Claude won his throw; for they only win who do not need to do so. De Rohan made an effort to retrieve himself, but failed. Then the stakes diminished, for Claude had had his revenge for

an impertinent question, and did not desire to gain a new reputation for wealth. However, he was three thousand louis to the good when Richelieu came over and touched him on the shoulder.

"Enough, Claude, enough for the time. Come with me. I need you now. M. Berkley will be always here to welcome you. I—well, I shall not be here every day. Come."

Claude rose, good-naturedly. "Certainly I will come, du Plessis. *Au revoir*, gentlemen."

"*Au revoir! Au revoir!* When do you present us to madame?"

"We shall be delighted to see you as soon as Mme. de Mirepoix has bestowed a card upon us."

A few further good-byes, and de Mailly and his old-time friend left the house together and moved slowly down the street, the Duke leading. Claude did not speak, for it was for his companion to open conversation. This Richelieu seemed in no haste to do. They had proceeded for some distance before he remarked, suddenly:

"It is cold."

"Most true. What hangs upon the weather?"

"This. It is too chilly to wander about outside. Take me to your apartment and present me to the Countess."

"With pleasure, if you wish it."

"Many thanks." They turned into a cross street that led towards the little Rue Anjou, when Richelieu, after a deep breath, began quickly, in a new strain: "Claude—do you know—that my fall is imminent?"

"What!"

"Oh, it is true. My fall is imminent. I am frank with you when I say that never before has my position been so beset with difficulties. You would learn soon, at any rate, and I prefer that you hear now, from me, what every member of the Court save Mme. de Châteauroux herself knows—that it was I who, beside myself with anxiety for the King, was the instrument of her dismissal from Metz."

Claude opened his mouth quickly as if to speak. Thinking better of it, however, he remained silent and waited.

"As I have said, madame, now out of touch with Court circles, has not yet heard of what she would term my treachery. But during the first conversation she holds with a courtier she must learn the truth. Of course, you perceive that, if she comes again into favor—I—am dismissed. Of course, also, her every nerve is strained towards the natural object of reattaining to her former position. My dear Claude, I am speaking to you in my own interests, but they are yours as well. Your cousin is just now playing with d'Agenois in order to rouse the possible jealousy of the King. It is her method. It may, for the third time, prove successful. But if the success does come, it will be over my fallen body. I shall oppose her as I have opposed nothing before, because never before have I been so deeply concerned. I would ask you, Claude, which side you will espouse—hers or mine?"

Claude was silent for a few steps. Then he said, musingly: "A battle between my cousin and my friend. You ask me a difficult question. Perhaps you are thinking that, if a d'Agenois alone fails with his Majesty, a d'Agenois and a de Mailly might do her work. Is that your notion? Hein?"

"Your astuteness is as perfect as of old. That is my notion. And I would beg of you that you do not allow yourself to be played with again."

"As a de Mailly—I might be willing. As the husband of my charming wife—I do not need your pleading to decide me."

Richelieu laughed, and there was relief in the tone. He had secured himself from one danger, and, out of gratitude, he should befriend this unknown wife if she were in the smallest degree possible. "And now for Mme. de Mailly!" he cried, gayly, with lips and heart, as they approached the house in the Rue d'Anjou.

"She will be delighted. I fancy her afternoon so far has been lonely."

In this Claude was wrong. Deborah's afternoon had been far from dull. Quite without her husband's assist-

ance she was learning something more of this Court life, this atmosphere in which he had lived through his youth. When he left her, early in the afternoon, after the gentle lecture on manners, Deborah's first move had been to take from her trunk those articles which Julie had been forbidden to touch, to carry them into the empty salon, and place them in the little black cabinet by the mantel, where she stood regarding them for some moments absently. They were ten crystal phials, of different sizes, filled with liquids varying in tone from brown to limpid crystal. Upon each was pasted a paper label, covered with fine writing, which told, in quaint phraseology and spelling, the contents of the bottle, and the method of obtaining it. Beside the flasks was a small wooden box with closed lid, containing a number of round, dry, brownish objects, odorless, and tasteless, too, if one had dared bite into them. They were specimens of *amanita muscaria* and *amanita phalloides* which Deborah, still catering to her strange delight, had brought to her new home, together with the best of her various experiments in medicinal alkaloids. To her profound regret, she had been unable to pack Dr. Carroll's glass retort. But here, some time when Claude was in humor, she would ask him to get her another; for surely, in this great city of Paris, such things might be obtained. Then, even here, in her own tiny dressing-room, she would arrange a little corner for her work, and so make a bit of home for herself at last. Poor Deborah was young, heedless, enthusiastic, and in love with her talent, as, indeed, mortals should be. She did not consider, and there was no one to tell her, since she did not confide in Claude, that no more dangerous power than hers could possibly have been brought into this most corrupt, criminal, and intriguing Court in the world. Reckless Deborah! After a last, long look at her little flasks, she closed the cabinet door upon them, locked it, and carried the key into her dressing-room, where she laid it carefully in one of the drawers of her chiffonier. From this little place she did not hear the

rapping at the antechamber door, nor see her lackey go through the salon. It was only when, with a slight cough, he announced from the doorway behind her, "The Maré-chale de Coigny," that Mme. de Mailly turned about.

"Oh!" she said, in slightly startled fashion. It was very difficult for her as yet to regard white servants as her inferiors. As she entered the little salon with cordial haste, Victorine, cloaked and muffled, rose from her chair.

"You are very kind to come. Cl—M. de Mailly is out. I was quite alone."

"That is charming. We shall get to know each other better now—is it not so? May I take off my péliste? Thank you. M. de Coigny and I have just come out—to Versailles, you know—for the winter. Later, we may be commanded to the palace. If so, I shall have to be under that atrocious Boufflers; and, in that case, life will be frightful."

While Victorine spoke she had, with some assistance from Deborah, removed all her things and thrown them carelessly upon a neighboring chair, after which she seated herself opposite her hostess, smiling in her friendliest manner.

"I should like to be able to offer you something, madame," said Deborah, hesitatingly, unable to banish the instinct of open hospitality. "What—would you like?"

Victorine smiled again, with a quick pleasure at the unaffected offer. "Thank you very much. A dish of *thé à l'anglais* would be delightful."

Deborah's heart sank. In Maryland tea was a luxury drunk only upon particular occasions. She had not the slightest idea that there was such an article in her kitchen here. Bravely saying nothing, however, she struck a little gong, and, at the appearance of Laroux, ordered, rather faintly, two dishes of Bohea. Laroux, receiving the command with perfect stoicism, bowed and disappeared, to return, in a very short space of time, with two pretty bowls filled with sweet, brown liquid. These he deftly arranged on a low stand between the ladies, placing beside

them a little plate of rissoles. Madame la Comtesse decided at once that such a servant as this should not soon leave her.

"Ah—this is most comfortable. I am going to remain with you during the whole afternoon. It is wonderful to find some one who is neither a saint, an etiquette, nor a rival. My faith, madame, one might say anything to you!"

Deborah smiled, sipped her tea, and could find nothing to reply. Her face, however, invited confidence; and the Maréchale sighed and continued:

"You seem to be almost happy! The look on your face one sees only once a lifetime. It is youth, and—inno—cence, I think. How old are you? Oh, pardon! I am absurdly thoughtless! But you look so young!"

"I am eighteen," responded Deborah at once.

"And I—nineteen. Beside you I appear thirty. It is because I have lived here for three years. Ah! How I have been bored!"

"It must have been very lonely all the summer. But now, with Monsieur the Maréchal returned, it will be better."

"Oh, you are right! It will be more difficult now, and so, more absorbing. But Jules lets me do almost as I please. If he were but more strict, less cold, François would have more interest. He is growing indifferent. Dieu! How I have worked to prevent that! But—it is imbecile of me! I care so much for him that I cannot behave as I should!"

"I do not understand," said Deborah, indistinctly, with a new feeling, one of dread, stealing over her. Instinctively she feared to hear what this pale, big-eyed little creature was going to say next.

For an instant Victorine stared at her. Then, leaning slowly forward and looking straight into Deborah's honest eyes, she asked, in a low tone, "You did not know—that de Bernis—that—I—"

Deborah sprang up, the empty tea-bowl rolling unheeded at her feet. She had grown suddenly very white, and,

as she returned Victorine's own look, searchingly, she found in the other face what made the horror in her own deepen, as she backed unconsciously towards the wall.

"*You don't know!*—Mon Dieu!—Why, Claude—was mad, mad, to have brought you here!—Why, madame—Deborah—we're all alike! You mustn't look at me like that. I am not different from the others. Henri de Mailly—the Marquise—the Mirepoix—Mme. de Rohan—Mme. de Châteauroux—child, it is a custom. The King—Claude himself—before—"

"Ah!" Deborah made a sound in her throat, not a scream, not an articulate word, but a kind of guttural, choking groan. Then she covered her face with her hands. For a moment that seemed an eternity she stood there repeating to herself those last cruel, insensate words, "'Claude himself—before—' "

And then Victorine, looking at her, came to a realizing sense of what she had done. Moved by a half-impulse, she started up unsteadily, swayed for an instant, and then fell back upon her chair, covering her head with her hands and arms, and bursting into a passion of sobs so heart-broken, so deep, so childlike forlorn, that they roused Deborah from herself. Letting her hands fall, she looked over towards her visitor. There was a note in the Maréchale's voice, and a line of utter abandon in her position, that brought a pang of woman's sympathy into the heart of the woman-child who regarded her. Putting away from her all selfishness, even that miserable thought of Claude, forgetting the brutal openness with which Victorine had spoken, she suddenly ran across the room and took Victorine into both her strong, young arms. Victorine's head found a resting-place on her shoulder; Victorine's aching, hopeless, impure heart beat for an instant in unison with that other one; Victorine's racking sobs ceased gradually. She gave a long, shivering sigh. There was a quickening silence through the room. Then the frail little figure loosed its grasp on Deborah, straightened quickly up, and turned to move to the chair where

her wraps lay. Dully, Deborah watched the Maréchale tie on her hood and pull the cloak about her shoulders. Then, picking up gloves and muff, the visitor turned again and moved back to where Deborah stood. In front of her she stopped, and her eyes, in which shone two great tears, rested in dim pity and sorrow upon Deborah's white face. The look lasted for a long moment. Then, slowly, without a word, the Maréchale picked her handkerchief from the floor where it lay and began moving towards the door. Before she had reached it Claude's wife spoke again, more steadily:

"Mme. de Coigny—you must not go—yet."

The Maréchale paused, with her back to Deborah, and stood hesitating.

"You must not go yet," repeated the voice. "You must tell me, first—about Claude."

A little moan came from Victorine's lips. "Claude—Claude—I cannot tell you about him. I know nothing! I—I lied to you. He is not like the rest."

"No, madame; that is not so. You try to be—kind. Was it—tell me—Mme. de Châteauroux? Yes. Now I know. That is true."

Victorine faced quickly around, the tears coming again into her eyes. Mme. de Mailly had begun to walk up and down the room, speaking in a monotone, twisting and untwisting her fingers as she went.

"I see. I know. Claude was exiled because the King—did not like him." Here she turned about and looked her companion squarely in the face. "Claude married me so that he might return to Court. In his letter the King said that he might return when he could present his wife at Versailles. Yes. Claude read that letter to me, and still—I married him. Oh, madame—" a nervous laugh broke from her—"did M. de Coigny do that to you?"

Victorine stared at her in horror of her tone. "Deborah—Deborah—don't look so! Claude isn't like that. And you—you are good. You are pure. Ah—I cannot forgive myself while I live for what I have done! Is there

anything that I can do? Tell me, is there nothing—nothing that I can do?"

"Oh, madame, may we not help also? Is it a new costume, or—"

It was Claude who spoke. He and Richelieu had entered the antechamber just in time to hear the last phrase. Mme. de Coigny faced about sharply. She knew that Deborah must have time to recover herself.

"It was not a garment—but a secret, messieurs. Monsieur le Duc, I am offended that I meet you for the first time since your return in the apartment of a friend. Have you struck me from your list?"

"Ah, madame, one does well to keep from your side, since one does not fight an abbé. M. de Bernis has more enemies from jealousy than any man about the Court," returned Richelieu, a trifle maliciously.

Claude, much displeased with the Duke's ill-timed pleasantry, glanced anxiously at his wife. Her manner was composed, but her expression he did not know.

"Madame, allow me to present to you M. de Richelieu, of whom I have so often spoken. Monsieur, Mme. de Mailly."

Deborah courtesied, and Richelieu bowed profoundly. For some unaccountable reason, the Duke's ready gallantry suddenly deserted him, and he could conjure up no fit compliment for this girl with the unrouged cheeks and the calm, frigid self-possession. Deborah's mood was new to Claude, and he regarded her with amazement, as she stood perfectly silent after the introduction, her glance moving slowly from Richelieu's immaculate shoes to his large brown eyes and the becoming curls of his wig. Once more it remained for Victorine to save the situation. She was wondering anxiously if her eyes were very red, as she asked:

"Gentlemen, you have been to—Berkley's—that name!—have you not?"

"Yes, madame, and we left your husband there. He lost to Claude here, I think. Mordi, Claude! The gods

are too good to you. If you would not have Mme. de Mailly carried off by some stricken gentleman, you should keep her locked in a jewel-case. Are you to be presented soon, madame, and by whom?"

Deborah blankly shook her head. "I do not know, monsieur."

Claude looked at her, more puzzled than ever, and Richelieu commented mentally: "Beauty and presence, without brains. It is as well."

"Mme. de Mailly-Nesle may present her, is it not so?" asked Victorine, again ending the pause.

"Certainly—I believe so. She has been a lady of the palace."

"I should advise Mme. de Conti, Claude. Her price is about two thousand francs, but she does it with an unequalled manner. She will direct the courtesies, the train, the kiss, the retreat, everything—perfectly. Besides that, you have her patronage forever after, particularly if you supplement the two thousand with a small jewel, or some such gift. Her rents are mortgaged, and she lives now on her presentations."

"When does the King leave Paris?" asked Claude, contemptively.

Richelieu shrugged. "On Wednesday, we trust. He is now making snuff-boxes by the score, and if a fit of cooking succeeds that—Heaven knows! He may remain at the Tuileries till Christmas."

Deborah stared at this information, and Victorine turned to her, laughing nervously: "Has not monsieur told you what an excellent cook his Majesty is? He rivals Marin; and it is said that, could he win a *cordons bleu*, he would wear no other order. His bonbons are delicious. I once ate some of those that he sent to—" she stopped suddenly.

"Mme. de Châteauroux," finished the Duke, fearing that her hesitation was for him.

Victorine nodded hastily. "Well, dear madame," she continued, turning to Deborah, "I must go. I have been with you an eternity. It grows late."

"Do you return to Paris, madame?" inquired Richelieu.

"No. We are already living here. My chair is below."

"Permit me, then, to escort you," said Claude, seeing that Deborah did not press her to remain.

"My dear Count, you must resign that happiness to me," observed Richelieu. "I am to sup with the King, and I have just time to reach Paris. Mme. de Mailly, I trust that our first meeting may prove our shortest."

"That is safe gallantry, monsieur, since one could scarce be shorter," returned Deborah, with something of her usual manner.

"Ah! That was better. Perhaps it is only embarrassment," thought Richelieu, as he made his farewells to Claude and bowed to Deborah's courtesy.

A moment later de Mailly and his wife were alone together. The sound of steps in the outer hall had died away. The little salon was quiet. Then the man and woman faced each other, Deborah mute, heavy-eyed, expressionless, her husband curious and expectant. After two minutes of uncomfortable silence he spoke:

"What is the matter, Debby? What has Victorine de Coigny said to you?"

Then, to his utter amazement, for he had never imagined her doing such a thing, he saw the girl's lip tremble, her face work convulsively with effort at control, and finally, as an ominous drop suddenly rolled over her eye and down her cheek, she turned from him sharply and ran into her boudoir, shutting the door after her.

Before Deborah consented to come forth from her retreat, his Grâce de Richelieu had arrived at the Tuileries, made a necessary alteration in his dress, and was admitted to the presence of the King, who, in company with de Gêvres and Maurepas, awaited him in the small supper-room. The Duke made proper apologies for tardiness, which Louis graciously accepted on condition that, during the *entremets*, he should recount the adventure that had kept him.

"Ah, Sire, it has been my fortune to encounter the lady

whom you deigned to salute on Saturday, in the window of the Hôtel de Mailly."

There was a murmur of interest from the other two as the King looked up. "By my faith, du Plessis, you are phenomenal! Who is she?—what is she? Is she eligible—or not?"

"Ah!" A sudden thought crossed Richelieu's mind. He answered very slowly, crumbling a bit of bread the while, "She is the Countess de Mailly, Claude's wife, and so a cousin to Madame la Duchesse de Châteauroux."

There was a pause. The atmosphere was dubious. De Gêvres and Maurepas rejoiced to think that they had been wise enough to voice no curiosity. Richelieu, perfectly calm, inwardly calculating, finished his soup. Suddenly Louis's mouth twitched, his eyes twinkled, and he permitted himself to laugh.

"Parbleu! he has taste in women, this Claude! Have her presented, du Plessis, and de Mailly shall have back his place. Her Majesty holds a salon on Sunday—the 21st, hein? Have her presented at all hazards. By my faith, the fellow has a taste in women!"

CHAPTER V

Two Presentations



UPON the 18th of November their Majesties, the dauphin, the royal suites, and, in a word, the French Court, returned to Versailles and took up its abode in palace or town for the winter. The little city was alive with nobility and nobility's servants. Every fourth person one met bore with him, as a mantle of dignity, some fifteen generations of ancestry; and every third man with whom one came in contact was one whose forebears, for fifteen misty and not wholly glorious generations, had been accustomed to the honor of adjusting nobility's wig and helping him on with his coat.

The great park of Versailles, with its leafless bosquets, its bare avenues, its deadened terraces, its lifeless fountains, was forlorn enough. But within the monster palace hard by everything hummed with preparation for the gayest of winters. Here was a hero-King returned from the scene of his heroisms, bored with doughty deeds, waiting to be entertained with matters strained to less heroic pitch. There on the second floor, behind the court of the grand staircase, with a little private stair of its own, empty and desolate behind its locked doors, lay the deserted suite of the favorite's rooms. And who shall say how many a great lady, honorable to her finger-tips, with some honor to spare, cast a mute, curious glance at that closed door, in passing, and went her way with a new question in her heart? Who shall tell the germs of intrigue, struggling jealousy, rivalry, hatred, ambition, and care that were fostered in this abode of kings during that third week in

November, when the "season" was budding, and would, on Sunday night, at the Queen's first salon, open into a perfect flower?

During that week, ever since Richelieu's visit on Monday, one would scarcely have thought that Deborah de Mailly had had time for thinking. There was never an hour when she could be alone. Claude's words were proven true. She had known nothing of what this life would mean; and she possessed not one leisure moment which she could have given to the care of their abiding-place. Slightly to her husband's surprise, certainly much to her own amazement, she had become a little sensation; and almost every member of the Court followed the speedy example of Mme. de Mirepoix and called upon her during that first week. The tale of the King's salute, of her forthcoming presentation, and, more than all, a story whispered behind Richelieu's hand of a possible favoritism, had wrought this result.

Deborah bore herself very well at the innumerable afternoon visits. Claude was always with her; but, after the first two days, she ceased to watch his eye, and found herself able to pay some little attention to the characteristics of the different people. She had small fancy for the Maréchale de Coigny, and an equally accountable dislike for de Bernis, who, for some reason of his own, paid her assiduous attention.

Each morning Deborah went to Paris, to her milliner's, where the presentation dress was being made. Claude almost always accompanied her on these trips, and during the long drives there should have been more than enough opportunity for them to discuss her first impressions of the new life. Though Claude could not tell why, such conversations never occurred. He felt, vaguely, that his wife was holding aloof from him. She was perfectly courteous, sometimes merry, in his company; but she was never confiding as she had been. At home there was no longer any necessity for them to linger in an antechamber before retiring, for the sake of being alone together. After eleven

at night they had their apartment to themselves. But, oddly enough, they now never saw each other alone. Deborah was occupied, was too tired, was not in the mood—any of a thousand things. Claude wondered, and was disappointed, but never pressed the point. Not once did it occur to him to connect her present impenetrability with the singular crying-spell on Monday evening, after her afternoon alone with Victorine de Coigny. He put her new manner down rather to the growing influence of the Court customs. And perhaps, to some extent, he was right.

Just now Claude's attention, like that of the rest of the Court, was concentrated upon the approaching Sunday evening. He was ambitious for Deborah. He wanted to make her success as great as possible. The danger of success he knew, perhaps, but the other alternative was worse; and, besides, not a hint of Richelieu's careful gossip had reached his ears. As to the royal salute which had, at the time, so annoyed him, he had now all but forgotten it in the renewal of his old connections, his old associations with every foot of this ground that was home to him. He had played a good deal during the week, to such purpose that there was now small cause to fear the necessary expenditures for the winter; and out of his first day's winnings at Berkley's he could pay for Deborah's entire wardrobe. Claude took more interest than his wife herself, perhaps, in the presentation dress, which had been especially designed to emphasize her freshness, her youth, and her slender figure. She was to wear very small hoops, which articles of dress were now in their largest possible state, preparatory to a long-needed collapse to the graceful puffs of the Pompadour era. Her petticoat was of white India crêpe, embroidered in white. Her overdress was of lace, made *en princesse*, with the train falling from the shoulders and flowing behind her for more than a yard, like a trail of foam in the wake of a ship.

The busy week ended almost too soon, and Sunday dawned—about an hour before his Majesty rose. During the morning Versailles was deserted. Not a lady had risen,

and the gentlemen went shooting, after mass, with his Majesty. Deborah, greatly to her displeasure, had been commanded to stay in bed till three in the afternoon, at which hour she might begin her toilet. Claude was with the hunting-party, however, and his wife rose at ten o'clock and had her chocolate in the dining-room, to the bland amazement of the first lackey. A little later, however, Madame la Comtesse regretted her wilfulness, for she had nothing to do. Despite Mme. de Conti's reassuring instructions, she was extremely nervous as to the evening. She had already practised the presentation at home, with Julie for her Majesty, chairs for the ladies of honor, and the King rather inadequately represented by her dressing-table. This morning, however, Deborah was not in the mood for the tiresome manœuvres, but instead sat disconsolately at the window, rigorously keeping her thoughts from home, and trying to fasten them, for want of a better subject, on the lady who was also to be presented that evening by Mme. de Conti. This, as history would have it, was a person of somewhat humbler birth than Deborah herself, styled in the beginning Jeanne Poisson, later wedded to solid Lenormand d'Étioles, and at some day now neither dim nor distant to become that Marquise de Pompadour whom an Empress of Austria should salute as an equal. Deborah mused for some time on this unknown lady, ate her solitary dinner without appetite, and lay on her salon sofa for two hours more, thinking unhappily of Maryland, before Julie roused her to begin the momentous toilet.

Evening drew on apace. Claude, returning at something past five from his royal day, found the hair-dresser at his task, and so proceeded to dress before he visited his wife. Supper was served to monsieur and madame in their rooms. Claude ate heartily and gossiped with his valet while his wig was being adjusted, his face powdered, and his suit, the most costly that he had ever worn, together with his diamonds, put on. When all was to his taste, he despatched Rochard to inquire, with much ceremony, if

madame would receive her lord. Madame would. And so Claude, with a smile of anticipation, drew from a little cabinet a large, flat, purple morocco box, and, with this in his hand, crossed the passage and tapped gently at the door of Deborah's boudoir.

Julie opened it. Within, facing him, her back to the toilet-table, stood his wife. The room was not very light. Only four candles burned in it, and the disorder of the little place was but dimly exposed. Deborah was quite dressed. Her figure looked taller than usual, from the smallness of her hoops; and, in her delicate, misty robes, with the uncertain light she appeared like some shadowy spirit. Claude stopped upon the threshold and looked at her in silence. She did not speak. And Julie, who had rightly thought her mistress the most beautiful woman in France, stood back in quick chagrin that Monsieur le Comte did not go into ecstasies of delight over madame.

"More light, Julie. She is very well so, but there will be a trying glare in the Queen's salon," was his first remark.

Deborah herself felt disappointed, and turned aside as her maid hastily lit the various waxen tapers in the brackets on the walls. When the little place was as bright as it could be made, Claude went to his wife, placed a hand upon her shoulder, and drew her gently about till she once more faced him. Then he stood off a little, critically examining her, and carefully refraining from any expression of his pleasure. Finally, when he had decided that art could do no more, he merely said, with a little smile, "You wear no jewels, Debby."

She was silent with displeasure, knowing him to be well aware that she possessed none. He passed behind her, however, picked up the box that he had brought in with him, and put it into her hands.

"It is my presentation gift," he said, a little wistfully.

"Claude!" she whispered, without lifting the cover.

"Open it—open and put it on. It is growing late."

Quite breathless now, she opened the box, and gave a

low exclamation. Julie shrieked with rapture, and Claude, reading his wife's expression, was satisfied with the reception of his gift.

"Oh, they are much—much more beautiful than Virginia's!" murmured Deborah, as, half afraid to touch them, she lifted the jewels from the box. They consisted of three rows of white pearls, clasped with a larger one, the first string passing just comfortably about her throat, the second somewhat longer, and the third touching the lace edge of her dress. The ornament was simple enough, but the stones needed no pendants to set them off. In size, evenness, and purity they were incomparable. Deborah's heart was touched. He was very kind to her—as kind as any real lover could be. Why must she always remember that she was a secondary object to him? Why could she never forget that he had only brought her here that his exile might be ended?

"Well then—you are pleased?" he asked, still wistfully.

"Oh yes! You are too good to me, Claude."

"A kiss, then?"

As she kissed him gently upon the forehead he seized one of her hands, clasped it tightly for an instant, and then, putting it quickly away from him, let her go. Julie approached with her wraps, and the lackey announced that the coach was waiting.

The apartments of the Queen in the palace of Versailles were on the south side of the *rez-de-chaussée*, in the body of the palace, looking out along the south wing. They consisted of five rooms, the Salon de la Reine, where so many royal functions were held, being between her Majesty's bedroom and the Salle du Grand Couvert; while a third door on the north side opened into the antechamber which led out to the Court of the Staircase. This last small room was, to her Majesty's circle, what the *Œil-de-Bœuf* was to the general court.

The reception planned for this evening of Sunday, November 21st, was to be rather more ceremonious than such affairs became later in the season. There would be

six presentations—a large number; and, to the Queen's delight, not only her usual small circle of friends, but the entire Court, had assembled here for the first time in more than a year. Judging from her smiling appearance, it was not probable that the Queen guessed that the reason why her rooms were so frequented was that certain tongues had set afloat the rumor that a new candidate for the favorite's post was to be presented to-night to Queen and Court, to be judged by them as eligible or not.

At one side of her salon, upon a raised dais, beneath a golden canopy, sat Marie Leczinska, royally dressed, looking only like the gentle Polish woman that she was, talking in low tones with Mme. de Boufflers, who would have liked very well to escape for a few moments into the throng. In two semicircular lines, from the throne to the door of the anteroom, leaving between them an open space, stood the *dames d'étiquette*, or, more properly, the ladies of the palace of the Queen, among whom, magnificently dressed, with the proceeds of her forthcoming task, was the Princess de Conti. Behind these formidable rows the rest of the Court stood, packed in such close masses that many a hooped toilet was threatened with collapse. About the throne were gathered the Queen's immediate friends, the "Saints," as they were termed by members of the King's set; Mme. de Boufflers, from necessity; the Duc and Duchesse de Luynes; M. and Mme. de la Vauguyon; the Duc and Duchesse de Luxembourg; the Cardinal de Tencin; the Cardinal de Luynes; Mme. d'Alincourt; the inevitable Père Griffet; and President Hénault. One person, however, who was becoming a very familiar figure to the Queen's household, was not with them to-night. This was the Abbé François de Bernis, whose connection with Mme. de Coigny had never been discussed in that part of the palace.

M. de Bernis was not, however, absent from Court on this interesting occasion. At the present moment he was in the antechamber, conversing in his peculiarly charming manner with a lady to whom he had just been presented by

Richelieu, and who was to be presented to the Queen by Mme. de Conti—Mme. Lenormand d'Etiolles. An extremely pretty woman she was, thought the abbé; and well dressed also, in her white satin, with stately hoops, and her neck covered with the sapphires that matched her eyes. While chatting with de Bernis she eyed Richelieu or made close scrutinies of the half-dozen other ladies in the room, with one of whom her stout husband was talking nervously.

"Are all the women here, Monsieur l'Abbé?" she asked, presently.

De Bernis glanced about him. "I have not yet seen Mme. de Mailly. She is late."

"Ah, Mme. de Mailly—the new Countess, is she not? I am curious to see her. She is a cousin of Mme. de Châteauroux."

"Her husband is the cousin. His wife—" de Bernis shrugged—"ended his exile for him, and so brought him back to his famous Marie Anne. However, they say that he never sees her now, so furious is the jealousy of his fair colonial. You know it has been whispered, madame, that his Majesty is less insensible than the young de Mailly."

"Ah! She is not lost yet, then?" inquired Mme. d'Etiolles, hastily.

"Not yet. But—when you have been presented, madame—" and de Bernis finished the tactful sentence with a look which completed it admirably.

Mme. d'Etiolles smiled with affected indifference; and her next remark was interrupted by the entrance of some one whose arrival at the anteroom created a small sensation. Deborah, with Claude beside her, carrying her cloak, and Henri de Mailly a step behind, with her fan and scarf, floated delicately in, her laces trailing noiselessly about her, apparently unconscious of her beauty, or of the fact that every eye in the little place was upon her. Richelieu, abruptly leaving de Mouhy, hurried to her side, inwardly delighted with her appearance. To Claude's surprise, and perhaps a little to Deborah's also, he paid her no com-

pliment whatever, but merely began a flying conversation on the people, the evening, and the season's promise of gayety.

"So that is the Countess de Mailly," observed Mme. d'Etiolles, after a long scrutiny. "How very—a—colonial she appears, and how inelegant she is with those small hoops! Her manner is bourgeois, one can perceive at once. Present her to me, Monsieur l'Abbé."

De Bernis, with an inward smile and very willing obedience, crossed over to Mme. de Mailly, and, after his salutation and some murmured phrases that made Deborah flush, informed her of the request of Mme. d'Etiolles. Deborah assented readily, for she hailed with no little relief the prospect of talking to a woman. She was not fond of the conspicuousness that Court ladies struggled for, and which resulted from being surrounded with men. A Maryland training was not that of Versailles.

In the end it was Richelieu who performed the introduction between the women. After their courtesies, Mme. d'Etiolles addressed Deborah very cordially, and with so many pretty words about her toilet that de Bernis nodded to himself at her display of one of the traits which promised a Court success. While the little group stood talking in one corner of the anteroom the first lady was summoned for presentation. No one but the abbé took any notice of the exit. He, however, whispered to Richelieu:

"They say that the King will not be present this evening. Is it so?"

The Duke took snuff, slowly. "My dear abbé, if I could read his Majesty's mind I should be first minister in a week."

De Bernis smiled, but looked unsatisfied as he turned again to the ladies. Presently, however, Richelieu continued in his ear: "The King had supper with Monseigneur, who made certain dutiful remarks regarding his *fiancée*, the Infanta Marie. These, since they might be construed into casting a slur on his Majesty's devotion to the Queen, threw Louis into a—well, a temper. One cannot tell wheth-

er he will recover or not. I, like the rest of the Court, shall infinitely regret it if he does not receive these charming women."

"Ah, my lord, has it ever occurred to you—beneath the rose—that Mme. de Mailly almost, in beauty and charm, approaches her—cousin, the Duchesse de Châteauroux?"

A quick frown passed over Richelieu's face, and he glanced sharply about him. Seeing no one who could have overheard the remark, however, he nodded shortly, saying in a tone that finished the matter: "Approaches—perhaps. That, Monsieur l'Abbé, many women might do."

By this time, in the salon, the first four presentations were over. They had been utterly uninteresting, the costumes commonplace, the courtesies only passably executed, and, worse than all, the King had not appeared. It was already long after ten o'clock, and there was small chance now of his entering on the scene. The Court yawned, not even behind its hand, and the very "saints" began to long for some better amusement. Rumor of interest to be found in such functions was certainly false.

After the fourth presentation came a pause.

"Are they finished?" inquired the Queen, hopefully, of the first lady.

"Mme. de Conti announces still two more, your Majesty."

"Two! That is not quite customary. However, bid her hasten them. This is very fatiguing."

A moment later the Princess de Conti passed into the antechamber, the pages at her side. Two or three moments after came the clear announcement from the chamberlain, at the door:

"Mme. de Conti has the honor to present to her Majesty the Comtesse de Nesle de Mailly."

At that moment a small, tapestried door cut in the wall beside the throne, and designed for unceremonious escape or arrival of royalty, was pushed quietly open, and Louis appeared. He was not instantly perceived, for every eye in the room was just then fixed on Deborah, who, with

Mme. de Conti at her side and a royal page bearing her train, entered and passed slowly up the salon towards the Queen. Half-way up the aisle, at a slight sign from her conductress, she made the first reverence. They were not simple to perform, these presentation courtesies. One was obliged to stop short in the walk, and, without any perceptible break in movement, sink slowly to the floor, rise again, and proceed. Many had been the nervous *débutante* who overbalanced in going down, and had to be rescued from disgrace by the skill of her lady of honor. The barest murmur—approval from the gentlemen and assent from the ladies—floated through the room as Deborah went gracefully down a second time. And the murmur continued, changed into one of surprise, when, Marie Leczinska being perceived to have risen, the King was discovered beside the throne, his whole attention concentrated on Mme. de Mailly in her laces. Deborah herself was extremely nervous. She alone, of all the roomful, had witnessed the entrance of the King. And now, as she finished the progress, her eyes, unconscious of what they were doing, remained fixed on Louis' face. The King was delighted. He answered the gaze with a slight smile, and beheld the young woman's eyes quickly fall, while the color rushed into her cheeks. The Queen, owing to the presence of her husband, stood, while Deborah made the last of the three grand courtesies. Her Majesty was greatly pleased with the youthful innocence of Mme. de Mailly's face and the odd simplicity of her costly dress. Therefore, when Deborah made the motion of kissing the hem of her garment, she extended her hand instead, and afterwards murmured, graciously:

"It is with delight, madame, that we receive you in our salon."

And as Claude's wife repeated the formula of her gratitude and devotion, his Majesty gayly advanced, and, with a "Permit me, Madame la Comtesse," kissed her, as was his custom, upon the left cheek.

Deborah had not been informed of this possible part of

the ceremony, and would have backed away in horror had not Mme. de Conti vigorously pinched her arm. A moment later they began the retreat. This time all the ladies of the palace must be included in the semi-courtesies which occurred with every four or five backward steps. It was a difficult performance for all three of the party, the presented, the presenter, and the train-bearer. Moreover, it was generally done under a running fire of whispered comments, some of which generally reached the ears of the *débutante*. Only one speech, however, was audible to Deborah as she passed; and over this she pondered, at intervals, for some days after, so that, when its full meaning was apparent to her, the shock of it was lessened.

"Positively, my dear," observed Mme. Créquy to Mme. de Grammont, "I begin to believe that the post is hereditary in this family."

It was with a sigh of perfect relief that Deborah saw the *portière* of the antechamber fall before her, blotting out the view of the salon, and, as she turned to Claude, Mme. de Conti said to her, graciously:

"Madame, permit me to make you my compliments on a most successful *début*. It is a pleasure to have been your conductress."

Mme. d'Etioles, hearing this from the corner wherein she still talked with de Bernis, at once advanced to her: "Mme. de Mailly, you put me in a difficult position. How am I to equal your success?"

Deborah looked a little nonplussed, for the insincerity of the remark was perfectly apparent to her. Claude, however, said at once, "Mme. d'Etioles, you have but to enter the room, when any one who appeared before you will be utterly forgotten."

Mme. Lenormand was satisfied, and responded to her summons without any apparent embarrassment. She was so complete a contrast to Mme. de Mailly that the two were not compared. Her manner, her bearing, her dress, all were perfectly conventional, all were of Court make, and of such extreme elegance that they defied criticism.

There was neither affectation nor particular modesty in her air as she made her three graceful courtesies, was addressed by the Queen, and saluted by the King. Neither were there many comments while she performed the retreat. She was more or less a familiar figure to the Court, where, though the fact of her low birth hampered her at every turn, she was secretly a good deal admired by many. On her return to the antechamber her husband received her, she exchanged a few cool words with him, a jest with de Bernis, and then, leaning upon the arm of the latter, returned to the salon, which was now a lively and informal scene.

The presentation of Mme. d'Etioules having been the last of the evening, her Majesty descended from the dais, the lines of the ladies of the palace were broken, and the promenade began. Richelieu, taking a flattering leave of Claude and Deborah, made his way as rapidly as possible to his Majesty, who, by a coincidence, was hurrying towards him.

"Ah, du Plessis, I find that I did well to come. Where is d'Argenson?"

"Just behind us, Sire. He is talking with the Count de Mailly."

"Come with me, then. I must speak to them both, but separately. You understand? You will occupy one, while—"

"I understand, Sire."

Claude and young Marc Antoine ceased their conversation as the King approached. After saluting both gentlemen, his Majesty turned to Claude. "Monsieur," he said, heartily, "we welcome your return with the greatest satisfaction. You read our letter well. Oh, we have not forgotten, you see. And we—compliment you, monsieur, upon having won the most charming of ladies. She is English, Monsieur le Comte?"

"From the colonies, Sire."

"A pity they are so far away. One would like to visit them."

Claude forced a smile, while Louis turned next to

d'Argenson. Upon this Richelieu at once crossed to the Count and opened conversation with him so adroitly that the King's next remarks were happily inaudible.

"And, by-the-way, my dear Voyer—put Mme. de Mailly, the new Countess, on the supper-list for Choisy."

D'Argenson bowed profoundly, to conceal his expression.

"And—Mme. d'Etioules, Sire?" he ventured.

Louis hesitated. "Not—not as yet," he said, finally.

CHAPTER VI

Snuff-Boxes



IT was the afternoon of November 22d, ten days after the King's return to Paris, not yet twenty-four hours since her Majesty's first salon at Versailles. The Abbé de Bernis, companionless, was proceeding slowly out of the grand entrance of the palace and down the broad avenue towards the first fountain. It was a raw day, gray and bleak, with a northeast Austrian wind, and an atmosphere resembling the relations between France and England. Nevertheless, the Abbé François was not walking hurriedly. If he were going into the town of Versailles, he was taking a circuitous route. The dress that he wore was decidedly non-clerical, being a rich costume of cramoisie satin, with very presentable Mechlin ruffles, and a heavily embroidered waistcoat. The wig was the only thing about him that proclaimed his calling, and even that, just now, was concealed by his hat and the high collar of the black cloak in which he was muffled.

De Bernis was on his way to spend an hour or two with Mme. de Coigny, whom of late he felt that he had neglected; and as he walked he reflected upon certain objective but important things. In the Court circles, as they stood to-day, and as he carefully reviewed them, there were infinite possibilities for advancement. It was a time when no level-headed man could fail to take certain advantages of the present situation for the betterment of his position. For the first time in ten years, the Court was open. No favorite ruled the King, and, by consequence,

the kingdom. And here the way was almost as clear for the ambitious among men as among women. For he who should be the one to bring to the notice of the King of France his next more than queen might, by his own unaided effort, obtain all the honor, glory, and left-handed, subtle power now divided among half a dozen ministers and courtiers.

By the time de Bernis got so far in his meditations he had reached the Star, and was about to enter the grand park, with its love-named allées, and the gloomy bosquets, so enticing in summer, now so grimly gray. The bare, black trees and shrubs, the frozen ground, the unshaded statues, poetic only when set in plummy foliage, hideous and indelicate now—all suddenly flashed over the abbé's senses as being like the remains of a dead passion, stripped of all the softening graces and secret beauty lent by love when love is hot. The simile turned his mind again to the woman whom he was going to see—Victorine, the little Victorine, whose whimsicalities had won his heart, but who was as tiresome as any other woman when she became to him devoted, submissive, content to obey, without even the desire to rouse jealousy in him. Was he tired of Victorine? Was her influence gone? Was she no longer of any use? De Bernis paused for an instant and thought. Of use? There was only one usage to which he could put a woman of Mme. de Coigny's position. That was—make, or at least attempt to make, her the greatest lady at Court. Would Victorine de Coigny be capable of filling that place at his request? Had she influence enough in high places? Would she be fresh enough to his Majesty to please? Should he make the attempt?

By the time the abbé reached his temporary destination he had made shift to answer his not very creditable questions and come to a kind of hazy determination concerning his course.

Mme. de Coigny was at home and would receive him. He was shown directly from the antechamber to the little salon off her boudoir. Here he seated himself by the

heavily curtained window, after throwing hat and cloak upon a chair beside the tall *escritoire*. Madame kept him waiting. He crossed his knees, and pulled from one of his pockets a little article wrapped in a feminine handkerchief. Returning the wrapper to the pocket, he sat idly examining what he held. It was a cross of golden filigree, apparently of Eastern workmanship, and set with red stones. The sun, at the moment, was near to breaking through the clouds, and he held the little thing up to watch the light play over the garnets, when the boudoir door opened and Victorine came quietly in.

"What have you there, François?"

He rose, looked approvingly at her toilet, and held out the cross.

"I found this, by chance, two or three days ago among some old possessions of mine sent from Tours. Would you care for it? I offer it—not as a symbol, you understand. Merely an ornament. It is not valuable."

"Thank you. It is valuable to me. I will keep it always—like all of your gifts."

He smiled slightly as she seated herself at a little distance from him. She was even paler than usual, and looked as though she might have been suffering physically.

"You are not well to-day?" he asked, gently.

"Oh yes; perfectly. I am never ill. I scarcely saw you last night. What did you think of the presentations? Is not Mme. de Mailly lovely?"

The abbé shrugged. "Very pretty. Parvenu, however. I prefer Mme. d'Etiolles; but you—before them all, Victorine."

A smile broke over her face, and, for a moment, transfigured it. "Ah, François, that is as you were. Lately, sometimes, I had thought you changed towards me."

He saw here an approaching opportunity for his difficult proposition. Rising, he drew another chair close to her, seated himself in it, and negligently took one of her hands into both of his. "Dear Victorine, I shall never change towards you," he said, in a low voice. "But there

are some things—some things which you do not quite consider.”

“What things? Tell me, François. Indeed, I will consider them. Only tell me all that is in your heart. I belong to you. You know that,” she whispered.

De Bernis moved uneasily. Tell what was in his heart? He was wiser than that; but his way was not easy. “You know, little one, that I am not a powerful man—not an influential one. Yet I am ambitious. I have but a small place to keep. There is a great one which I wish to win. A—cardinal’s hat, Victorine! That is my dream! You see, I am opening my heart to you.”

“Ah, if I could make you a cardinal—if I could make you Pope, François! If I could make you the greatest man in the world!”

“You have made me the happiest,” he answered, tenderly, touched a little by her unselfishness.

“Then, if that is true, François, what more can you desire? The beretta could do no more for you.”

“I am caught, my philosopher. And yet—and yet ambition does remain. I am not quite the happiest of men. I would wish to give you a higher place. I wish to be worthy of you. I would give you, for your slave, the most powerful man in France.”

“Ah,” she said, smiling, “I could love him no better than I love you. My dear, if I were given my choice between you and the King of France, do you not know which I should choose?”

He bent over her quickly. “*Which* would you choose?”

“How can you ask? You do not doubt me?”

“Nay, but, Victorine, if, by being favorite of the Court, of the King, you could further your own interests, if you could further *mine*—if I asked it of you—”

He broke off suddenly. Her face was changing.

“What do you mean?” she demanded, and there was something in the tone which made him thankful that he had gone no further. “Are”—she breathed convulsively, but went on in a lighter manner—“are you testing me?”

Are you trying to learn my nature—how far I would sink? Ah, François, you, who have given me such joy, the only happiness that I have known, have given me also my greatest sorrow. Do not think, because I renounced everything for you, that I am like the women of the Court. I loved you—I love you—you always—more dearly than—honor. But, François, it was only for love. I am proud that you had no position to give me. I swear to you, by what I still hold sacred, that if the post won by Mme. de Châteauroux were offered me by his Majesty, on his knees, I would prefer to die than to accept such a thing.” She passed her hand over her forehead, and lay back again in her chair, smiling a little at his earnest frown. “I do not censure Mme. de Châteauroux, François, you understand. She loved the King—as I love you.”

The actual veracity of this last statement was an immaterial thing. It was Victorine’s belief in it that did her honor. François did not remark upon it, neither did he voice any further confessions of ambition. Mme. de Coigny was singularly blind to her interests and his. She was not the type of woman that belonged to a court. True, had her position been rather more influential, no man need have desired better things than would have fallen to the lot of the sagacious abbé. But, being only the wife of a Marquis field-marshal, and too single-hearted for wisdom, she was a luxury undesirable for a rising man. For an instant de Bernis’ thoughts were directed to the husband. After all, his position as one of the favorite courtiers, and one really esteemed, would have been difficult to overcome in order that madame might be installed alone in the palace. It was as well, perhaps, that her trend of mind was such as he had discovered it to be. It was also as well that, in the midst of the reflective pause, the antechamber door should unexpectedly have opened, and M. de Coigny himself have entered the room.

“Ah! Pardon me, madame. I was unaware that you were engaged.”

Victorine rose quickly, looked at her husband, saw his

eyes meet those of the abbé, and remained silent. De Coigny was about to turn upon his heel and leave them, to her great relief, when François spoke:

"I beg, monsieur, that you will not let me deprive you of madame's society. I am just on the way to Paris, and was taking my leave as you came."

He finished, quite heedless of Victorine's imploring glance, which, however, de Coigny caught.

"If you are going to the city, you must first have something—a glass of wine. Yes, yes! It will not be long. I will order at once."

In spite of de Bernis' earnest protestation, Victorine summoned the valet and ordered wine and rissoles for all three.

"You will, then, allow me to partake with you?" asked the Maréchal, with a quizzical scrutiny of his wife, who merely nodded, saying, dully:

"We are delighted, monsieur."

De Bernis was displeased. It was never agreeable to him to face Jules de Coigny, and he would have been glad to escape at once after that destructive silence of Victorine's. He had all his ideas to readjust, a fresh plan to make, and a verse or two to compose for extemporaneous use during the evening. However, he made better show of being at ease for the next quarter of an hour than did madame; and he managed to carry on a very creditable conversation about the Vauvenargues salon while sipping his wine and crumbling the paté. He took his departure, without undue haste, at just the right moment, kissed madame's hand with ceremony, and bowed himself away from the Maréchal, feeling that he should not often see that small salon again. It would not be wise.

When the abbé was gone, and Jules and his wife were left alone together, Victorine looked uneasily about her, hoping for a means of escape.

"I must ask your pardon, madame, once more, for having been so stupid as to have intruded upon you. Gérome did not inform me—"

"It is of no consequence, monsieur. As you heard, the abbé was on the point of departure. Did you, by some chance, wish to speak with me?"

"The matter was not of great importance. However, I thought that it might please you to learn that Mme. de Châteauroux is likely soon to be reinstated. This afternoon his Majesty was good enough to talk with me freely *en tête-à-tête*. He misses the Duchess very much. He is preparing, quietly, to place her at her post again. She is your friend. I thought that it might give you pleasure to know. Of course, what I have told must not be repeated."

"Thank you, Jules. I am very glad. Marie has been my good friend always."

"It was she, I believe, who presented to you M. de Bernis?"

"Yes," replied Victorine, looking up at him in surprise.

There was a pause. De Coigny should have been making his departure. Yet still he stood there, as awkwardly as possible, half turned from his wife, who sat regarding him in some astonishment, and without the desire to say a word. The marshal's head drooped a little. He put one hand to his forehead, and seemed to be going through an inward struggle. Several moments passed. Madame moved restlessly. Finally she said:

"What is it, Jules? What have you further to say to me?"

Coigny shook his head and passed his hand over his eyes. "It is immaterial, Victorine. I have already said it once. I will not repeat myself. It is—immaterial, I say. Good-afternoon."

"Good-afternoon."

And thus it was to the vague relief of the woman that he left her there, in her small salon, alone.

The first part of the foregoing conversation might have proved very serviceable, at this time, to the Abbé de Bernis. He was not, however, so fortunate as even to chance upon the idea of such a thing as the reinstallation of la Châteauroux. As he drove towards Paris he continued his

meditations on the topic which had occupied him all day. They had now taken a surer trend. One doubtful possibility was done away with. He found himself left with two others, less dubious, but, had he the wit to surmise it, possibilities which half the men of the Court were quietly planning, even as he himself, to make their own.

De Bernis dined at the Café de la Régence, a popular and fashionable resort; and thereafter, being now happily independent of the Lazariste and all such houses, betook himself to his rooms in the Rue des Bailleuls, not a great way from the Hôtel de Ville, and near the old Louvre. After adding, here, a few touches to his toilet, he took a chair to the Hôtel de Tours, where M. de Vauvenargues held his brilliant salons.

It was a night when nothing was happening at Versailles. The Queen, satisfied for the time with her success of the previous evening, played cavagnole with Hénault, and prepared for an extra hour in her oratory. His Majesty had claimed de Berryer for the night, and gone off on one of those strange expeditions in which he occasionally indulged. The great palace thus being desolate, all the world bethought itself of Paris, and, in the same instant, of the Hôtel de Tours and its host. The rooms there were crowded by the time de Bernis arrived. Every possible circle, from the Court to the philosophical, was in evidence. In the first room, where Monsieur was obliged to receive till a late hour, the lesser and most professional lights of society mingled in a heated throng. In the second salon, connected with the first by a small, yellow-hung ante-chamber, the gaming-tables were set, around which, talking or at play, were grouped the aristocratic dwellers of Versailles. Among these was Claude, sunk in piquet, and Deborah, conducted by Mme. de Jarnac, and hence claiming place with the bluest-blooded dames of the day; which fact, however, incredible as it seemed, failed to make her happy.

While the crowded and uncomfortable devotees were circling in slow masses through the larger apartments,

there had been gradually collecting, in the yellow ante-chamber, a small group of gentlemen who, as it happened, had more at stake than gold. The tacit subject of their apparently superficial conversation was the decision of the next ruler of Versailles and the consequent determination of their own forthcoming influence in Court circles. Here, foremost of all, with most at stake, was Richelieu—Richelieu in violet satin and silver, with pearls, point de Bruxelles, and snuff-box. Next to him, upon a tabouret, apparently half asleep, indolent, smiling, was de Gêvres, with opposition to Richelieu coursing in fiery determination through every vein. Yonder sat d'Epéron and Penthievre; while, completing the group, were Holbach, who had left Montesquieu at the point of interaction between body and soul, and François de Bernis, swelling with vanity at being seen in such company. All about this impenetrable band, during their conversation, incomprehensible to him who should catch but a syllable or two of it, wandered men and women of various degrees, curious, envious, anxious, one and all willing to have given half a fortune to have been able to join this party, which represented the dwellers in sacred, nearest places to royalty, to France's King. Possibly these men were unconscious of their greatness. Certainly they were too interested in themselves and their plans to enjoy, for the moment, the apparent adulation of outsiders. It was like a meeting of the Council of Ten held in the middle of St. Mark's Square of an afternoon.

Penthievre had finished an anecdote of the far-off days of Gabrielle d'Estrées, containing a clever apologue, for which he was mentally applauded by the group.

"A clever woman!" murmured Richelieu, dreamily. "I cannot help thinking that if Sully had taken her part, instead of opposing her—"

"Marie de Médicis would have made less difficulty."

Richelieu stared at de Gêvres, who had interrupted somnolently, and remarked, with some insolence: "You miss

the point, I think. Her Majesty is scarcely included in the affair."

"Noailles—Sully. Marie de Médicis—Fate," was the retort.

Richelieu shrugged. "It was too vague, Jacques."

"Let us return to the present. We shall find it less complicated," suggested Holbach, quietly.

The others acquiesced with alacrity. Their problem was too important to trust to forgotten history for solution. At this moment Richelieu, with serious intent, took snuff, raising the cover of his box in so significant a manner that it was impossible that all should not perceive its miniature to have been removed, leaving the tarnished gold alone visible under the pearl-surrounded glass.

"Ah!" murmured d'Epernon, "what has become of the Duchess?"

"I shall present the picture, as a mark of my high esteem," said Richelieu, "to M. d'Agenois."

There was a general smile. Then de Gêvres remarked, slowly: "I will purchase that miniature of you for my own use, du Plessis."

"What! Have you not one of her?" cried de Bernis.

De Gêvres pulled out his own box and handed it to the abbé. In it was an exquisitely painted portrait of Marie Anne de Nesle, done just before she was created Duchesse de Châteauroux.

"What, then, would you do with another?"

"I should present it, in a few weeks' time, to the King."

"Diable! You are not stupid enough to believe that she is to be reinstated?"

"I am sufficiently stupid—to believe exactly that."

Richelieu looked seriously annoyed. For a long time he and de Gêvres had, from policy, been the best of friends and strong allies. They, together, one summer evening, on the terraces of Versailles, had first presented the Marquise de la Tournelle to the King. And since then they had worked constantly on her behalf. De Gêvres, however, having been the more moderate of the two, was now

in a position which Richelieu had recklessly forfeited—sure of favor in any case.

Baron d'Holbach, seeing the situation a little uncomfortable, broke the pause by producing his own snuff-box and displaying its cover. "Messieurs," he said, "we are carrying with us to-night the history of France. Behold!"

All leaned forward to look upon the delicately painted features. They were those of Pauline Félicité de Vintimille, the sister and predecessor of Mme. de Châteauroux.

"It is old-fashioned, gentlemen, but I have always liked the face—so young—so gentle—so sad beneath the smile," observed the philosopher.

"I can complete the trio," said Penthievre, laughing, and producing another round lid. "I was reminiscent to-night, and selected this from my collection."

"Parbleu! it is entertaining," remarked d'Epernon, while the others were silent, thinking a little, perhaps, of days not long past; for the third miniature was of Louise Julie de Nesle, Comtesse de Mailly, Claude's cousin and sister-in-law.

"D'Epernon and de Bernis, let us see yours. Perhaps they will have a new bearing on the subject, and will bring a prophecy."

D'Epernon shook his head. "My top is merely amber, without decoration."

"And you, Monsieur l'Abbé?"

De Bernis flushed. "Mine is—personal, gentlemen. I shall change it."

"Let us see—ah! Mme. de Coigny. Did you take it from Mailly-Nesle?"

"No, M. de Gèvres. Mme. Victorine was so good as to present it," was the slightly haughty reply.

"But you are going to change it, you know. Tell us, what new face is to displace this?"

"I will tell you, M. de Richelieu, when you have confessed what one is to fill your empty space."

"Ah, yes—make your prophecy, du Plessis," drawled de Gêvres.

"Well then, if you will know," Richelieu lowered his tone, "the post is going to continue for a fourth turn in the family de Mailly. Within three months I shall place here the face of—Count Claude's wife."

"Ah!"

"Really!"

"The colonial?"

"Perhaps!"

"And now you, abbé?"

"I differ from M. de Richelieu. I should rather suggest—the lady now standing behind M. d'Epèrnon."

The party glanced discreetly about to behold a pretty woman in pink brocade, who was laughing at some remark from the Abbé Coyer.

"What! The last débutante? Mme. d'Etioles?"

"Bah! Pardon, de Bernis, but she is of the bourgeoisie."

"And is Mme. de Mailly of higher birth?"

There was a moment of unexpected silence. Then Richelieu said, slowly: "I had understood that she was of excellent blood. Six generations, it has been said."

Penthièvre and d'Epèrnon nodded agreement. Such, certainly, had been the rumor. De Bernis looked a little nonplussed.

"Then Mme. de Mailly is—your choice?" he asked of Richelieu.

"Oh," the Duke shrugged, "that is a little direct, Monsieur l'Abbé. I much admire Mme. de Mailly. His Majesty admires her."

"She is on the supper-list for Choisy," murmured Penthièvre.

"Ah! Where did you hear it?"

"From young d'Argenson. The King was pleased with her appearance at the presentation."

"And it was not by his arrangement, either."

"I wonder," asked d'Holbach, musingly, of the air,

"if Claude de Mailly will let her go, without expostulation, to one of the Choisy suppers."

"It is doubtful," replied de Gêvres, yawning.

Richelieu said nothing, but under his languid exterior was a fierce determination that Mme. de Mailly, Claude or no Claude, *should* go to a Choisy supper, and the first to which she was asked.

"And now, Monsieur l'Abbé, what attributes for the post has your pretty bourgeoisie, Mme. d'Etiolles?" inquired d'Epernon.

Softly, as he answered, the abbé tapped Victorine's miniature. "One attribute, Monsieur le Duc, which I think that Mme. de Mailly lacks, and without which a woman is—to be frank—useless. Mme. d'Etiolles has ambition to win the place."

"You know that? She confesses it?" asked Richelieu, leaning suddenly forward, and betraying more interest than, considering the proximity of de Gêvres, was dignified.

"Confessed it? Not in words. There was but her eye, her animation, her color, the quivering of the nostril—an air hard to describe, easy to read, which you all know, messieurs."

"But yes!"

"And she has the tact to compliment a rival. That is excellent."

"True. But Mme. de Mailly is a far newer type. She is young, *ingénue*, naïve; would not understand even that compliments were required. And novelty, gentlemen, novelty, is what we all, not less than his Majesty, require."

"That is true. I feel it necessary at this moment. Supper must surely have been announced by this time. I go to seek 'la Poule',"* observed de Gêvres, rising.

"Is Mme. de Flavacourt here?" whispered d'Epernon of Penthhièvre as, the conference over, the little group broke up.

* Louis XV.'s nickname for Mme. de Flavacourt.

"Yes. She has just passed into the other room with d'Hénin."

"Gêvres follows her."

"Of course, since he is avowedly for la Châteauroux."

"And Richelieu approaches the little American. Behold, he is going to be her supper companion."

"Now it is only left for the abbé to seek Mme. d'Etioles."

"Dastard! He deserts his colors. See, he is coming with Mme. d'Egmont. Coigny not being here, it seems he lays siege to the second lady of that family."

"Hein? It is very warm here. *Au revoir*. I am going to seek the Marquis de Mailly-Nesle—you see, I am on two sides so."

Penthièvre disappeared in the throng which had begun to move more rapidly to the supper apartment in the rear. "It now behooves me," murmured d'Epernon to himself, "to take pity on de Bernis' choice. But that will be an effort. No. I will be original. I will go in alone. I will be the only man of all Versailles to-night who has no woman in his brain!"

CHAPTER VII

Concerning Monsieur Maurepas



NOTWITHSTANDING de Richelieu's confidence in the rising of the new de Mailly star in the Versailles heavens, and François de Bernis' more reserved and more diffuse plans, it appeared, after all, that de Gêvres' stubborn loyalty to the old favorite was not misplaced. To the vast chagrin of most of the court, and the strong anxiety of a small portion of it, his Majesty, attended by his private suite and Jean Frédéric Phélippeaux de Maurepas, went from Versailles back to the Tuileries on the afternoon of November 23d.

M. de Maurepas had the honor of driving alone with the King. The roads were bad, and the royal coach grievously heavy, so that the poor minister came to be in difficulties for entertaining conversation towards the last stages of the three-hour journey. Louis listened good-naturedly to his various remarks, but at length took occasion to switch the topic round to that one of all others which Maurepas had been trying to avoid.

"'Tis said, Phélippeaux," observed the King, blinking, "that our dear friend the Duchesse de Châteauroux, and you, our other dear friend, are not amicably disposed towards one another. How is this?"

"Sire, believe me—the—little difficulty began through no fault of mine, if through the fault of any one."

"Relate it to me."

Maurepas coughed. The situation was undeniably disagreeable, but an effort must be made. The less hesitation, at all events, the better. "Your Majesty, it had to

do with a house, the Hôtel Maurepas, which three years ago was the Hôtel Mazarin, but fell to me at Mme. de Mazarin's death, thus obliging Mme. de la Tournelle to leave it on the demise of her grandmother. We are connected, you know, Sire."

For a moment or two the King remained silent, and his companion sat dreading an outbreak of displeasure. Presently, however, Louis remarked, without much expression: "Since her leaving the Hôtel de Mazarin was the occasion of her appearance at Versailles, one might imagine that madame would strive to modify her anger. Is that all the reason, monsieur?"

"Latterly, Sire, it has been intimated to me that madame thought me her opponent—a—politically. Need I assure your Majesty that my only political interest is yours, and that in so far as Mme. de Châteauroux has been essential to your good pleasure, in so far she has been esteemed by me. Unfortunately, however, it is whispered that madame believes me the instrument of her departure from Metz. This, indeed, is utterly false, I as—"

Louis, who was looking slightly amused, raised his hand: "Enough, Phélippeaux. I am aware of some things. We shall try, during the forthcoming week, to give you the opportunity of proving to madame your entire innocence in that regrettable affair. I wish you to become reconciled to madame, Phélippeaux, for, to be plain, I can do without neither of you."

Maurepas acknowledged this high compliment with some little pleasure; but, as the horses hurried forward, and silence fell between the two, the Marquis found himself at liberty to think some by no means agreeable thoughts. It was quite true that, even in former times, when there was no open rupture between them, love had never been lost between the King's minister and the favorite. Maurepas found his Court path very much smoother when the Duchess was not moving just ahead of him, and, despite his loyalty to the King's wishes, he had small desire that the King's well-beloved should return to Versailles. For

that reason this present journey to the Tuileries, its object now becoming perfectly plain, began to assume a decidedly unpleasant appearance. Maurepas was well able to cope with the favorite in his own way; but his way was not that of the King. How, then, was he to gain his point, satisfy himself, and, at the same time, please that difficult pair, Marie Anne de Mailly and Louis de Bourbon, equally well, as he needs must?

During this soliloquy the royal coach passed the barrier and entered the dark streets of the city. After twenty minutes of silent and rapid driving, Louis touched his minister's arm.

"Look, Phélippeaux, there is the very house towards which, to-morrow, I take my way."

Whether by accident or by order, they were passing through the little Rue du Bac on their way from the bridge to the palace. Maurepas obediently leaned out of the window and gazed up at the narrow house now inhabited by the most celebrated woman in France. The lower story of the building was dark. The upper one was lighted brilliantly, in front.

"Possibly she is ill," muttered Maurepas, under his breath.

And Maurepas' surmise was right. La Châteauroux *was* ill. A long and fruitless course of d'Agenois, of re-pining for her lost position, of battling for herself, single-handed, against the drawn ranks of the *dames d'étiquette*, with but a momentary glimpse of the King on his way to mass after his return, with the news of the beginning of the winter fêtes, and, finally, more than all, the possibility that she had been effaced from Louis' memory by the appearance of a rival—these things had preyed upon her woman's nature till they threw her into a nervous fever which medicine but increased, and for which there was but one remedy. Sad weeks, indeed, these were. Her brave defiance was broken. Day after day, through the long gray hours, she would lie in her bedroom, silent, impatient, answering sharply if spoken to, otherwise mute,

uncomplaining, and melancholy. Young d'Agenois was with her constantly, and now importuned marriage till at times she was near consent. What frayed strand of hope still held her back it were difficult to surmise. How had it been with her had she accepted this young man's eagerly proffered self? Had the tragedy of Versailles been doubled or avoided? Had de Bernis or Richelieu won his wager? Useless to guess. At eleven o'clock on this night of the 23d of November young d'Agenois left his lady's fauteuil, and the light in the top story of the Rue du Bac went out for a little time.

At twelve o'clock on the following day, while madame was meditating another struggle with the clothes that so tortured her fevered body, Fouchet, down-stairs, was called to the door. At the entrance stood a muffled man, bearing in his hand a note—for the Duchesse de Châteauroux. Fouchet was well trained. He gave no sign, but his heart grew big, for his own position's sake, when he recognized the sharp features of Bachelier, the King's confidential valet.

"There is no answer?" queried madame's man, peering out.

"Yes," was the reply. And so Bachelier waited in the lower hall.

In ten minutes the lackey returned. Bachelier rose. "Well?" he asked.

"At nine o'clock this evening," was the message. And with it, and a nod of satisfaction, the royal servant left the house.

He left much behind him that may be easily enough imagined. Enough to say that the designated evening hour found the once gloomy little *hôtel* in a most unwonted condition. The whole lower floor was lighted softly, with not too many candles, for Mme. de Châteauroux's face bore the ravages of anxiety and illness. The salon, in perfect order, was empty. Not so the little dining-room, a charming place, with elaborate decorations of palest mauve and gold, a crystal chandelier, and a tiny round table in its

centre, heaped with a profusion of flowers, and the most delicate collation that Mme. de Flavacourt and the chef together could devise. No wines had been brought up, for they were kept cooler below. But here, upon her *chaise-longue*, no rouge upon her flaming cheeks to-night, hair elaborately coiffed for the first time in many days, swathed all in laces, covered with a piece of pale, embroidered satin, arms and hands transparent in the light, her whole form more delicate than ever before, reclined Marie Anne de Mailly—waiting.

Minutes passed and the hour drew near. Madame moved nervously, her hands wandering over the shadowy garments. The whole hidden household breathed uneasiness, anticipation. Clocks chimed nine. The hour was past. He was late—no! Mme. de Châteauroux sat up. There had been the faintest knock at the door. Fouchet hurried through the hall. For an instant the Duchess tightly clenched her hands. Then her face changed utterly in expression. All anxiety and eagerness slipped away from it. It had become calm, cool, indifferent, showing strong marks of physical suffering. The eyes burned with determination, but her mouth wore a peculiar, disdainful smile that few women, in her place, would have dared to use.

Now a black-cloaked figure hurried through the salon, stopping on the threshold of the room where madame lay. Here the protecting hat and coat were rapidly thrown aside, and the new-comer hastened to madame.

“Anne!” cried the King, gazing down at her in delight.

The cheeks of la Châteauroux grew a little redder, her eyes a little more brilliant. “Your Majesty will pardon me that I do not rise?” she said.

“Bachelier told me of your illness. I am sincerely sorry,” he returned, examining her closely.

“Will your Majesty be pleased to sit?”

“‘Majesty,’ Anne? ‘Majesty?’ What nonsense is this? Have you become a waiting-maid? It is ‘Louis’ when we are together, you and I.”

Madame drew away a little. "You wish that?" she asked, looking at him keenly.

"'Tis what I have come for. Ah, madame—Versailles is empty now! I have been bored—they have bored me to death." He turned away with one of those abrupt transitions from tenderness to fretfulness which were so characteristic of him as a king. He yawned as he drew a small chair up to his Duchess, and seated himself heavily thereon. "I wish you to return to Versailles," he said, with an air of putting an end to the matter.

Mme. de Châteauroux glanced at him and slightly shrugged her shoulders. "That will not be so easily arranged."

"What! You do not wish to return?"

"Why should I? Life there was not at all easy. Many changes would be necessary before I should consent to live again inside its walls."

"What changes? Do you want larger rooms? More servants? A cabriolet added to the berline? Your cook was always very good."

"Ta! Ta! Ta! Rooms!—coaches! It is *people* I mean, Sire."

"Oh!" Louis' face grew more grave. Madame lay perfectly still, watching him. He was obliged, after a moment or two of painful silence, to ask, sulkily, "What people do you want—dismissed?"

"Your Majesty might easily surmise that."

"I? How am I to surmise your rancors, Anne?"

"My dismissal from Metz—"

"It was against my wishes, I swear to you!" he put in, hastily.

"Then your—repentance for scandal," she murmured, quickly, smiling beneath her lids. As the King flushed she was wise enough to waive the point. "I am aware that you were so—generous as to wish me to remain there," she observed. "But the man who *did* cause my departure, my dis—"

"Was Chartres, madame. I am unable to dismiss a prince of the blood from Versailles even for you."

"I did not refer to Monseigneur. It is Maurepas that I want sent off."

"Maurepas! Mordi! Do you fancy he had anything to do with it?"

"He had all to do with it. He hates me, that man. I vow that until he has left Versailles I will not show my face there at any cost."

Louis grew red with irritation. "You are absolutely wrong, Anne. De Maurepas had no more to do with your going than I. I swear it!"

"Then who was the man that instigated Monseigneur to force his way into your apartment?"

The King hesitated. Richelieu was a great favorite with him. Were it possible he would have kept the truth of the matter from madame. If it were not possible—he sighed, mentally—Richelieu must go. He could, at all events, be spared better than Maurepas, who had the invaluable ability of steering the water-logged ship of state very skilfully between the oft-threatening Scylla of debt and Charybdis of over-taxation.

Presently Louis rose and moved over to the table. Here, after looking absently about, he picked up an egg filled with cream (a new and delicate invention). Taking up a knife, he struck off the egg's head. This was a favorite trick of his, and one which he performed with unerring daintiness. "Look, Anne. Had it been Maurepas who forced our *consigne*, this is what we should have done to him." He smilingly held up the end of the shell for her to see, and then, putting it down, began to eat the cream.

"I had not heard that any one had been beheaded of late. I thought it was out of fashion," observed madame, with apparent interest.

"True enough. I'll send Maurepas to tell you about everything. But, look you, if I have that person—exiled, if I present you with a list of courtiers for you to do as you

wish with, if I reinstate you mistress of Versailles, will you in turn grant me two requests?"

"Let me hear them."

"You must see no more of d'Agenois—the creature whom I once exiled. And Phélippeaux and you must be reconciled. I will not have quarrels in my household. Will you agree to these things?"

He looked at her sharply, and she returned the glance with one that he could not read. "The first—d'Agenois—pouf! You may have him. He wearies me inexpressibly," she said, after a pause. "But Maurepas— Besides, I have not yet signified a wish to return to Versailles. A month ago I wrote to Richelieu that I never should."

"Really! To Richelieu! And what was his reply?"

"Nothing. He did not reply."

"A pity. Well then—you refuse to come back?"

"No. That is, I would not refuse, but that—I am not fond of M. de Maurepas."

She had carried her stubborn insolence too far at last. The King frowned, threw away his egg, and marched steadily over to where he had thrown his hat and cloak. "It is as well. I gave you your choice, madame. Maurepas is no Comtesse de Mailly. Neither you nor any woman can drive him from my court."

At the tone of Louis' voice madame's heart had suddenly ceased to beat. She saw her mistake. Was it too late? No. On the threshold of the doorway the King, after a hesitation and struggle with himself, turned. She seized her final opportunity without a pause. Holding out her arms with exaggerated feebleness, she said, slowly:

"Send Phélippeaux to me to-morrow. He shall plead his cause."

And thus her danger must have ended, and Louis' point have been satisfactorily gained; for it was past midnight when France left the Rue du Bac, to proceed by chair to the Tuileries. "Maurepas will be with you at noon; and may the god of friendship preside at the meeting!" were his parting words to the Duchess, who

nodded and smiled her approval. Then, while Fouchelet and the second valet cleared the remains of the feast from the little, disordered table, the mistress of Versailles, pale, burning with fever, and exhausted with fatigue, every nerve quivering with excitement at the life reopening to her, dragged herself to her bedroom, where Mme. de Lauraguais and the round-eyed maid awaited her arrival.

On Thursday morning, which was the 25th of November, the King broke fast with Maurepas at his usual hour. Louis was sleepy, and slightly, very slightly, inclined to be sharp of temper. When he informed his companion of the impending visit for that day's noon, Maurepas made no objection in words or manner. Nevertheless, he was intensely displeased. He knew very well his master's ways, and he realized that the tone in which he was bidden to come to a full and cordial understanding with her Grace was not to be disregarded. Therefore, at five minutes to twelve, with official punctuality, M. Jean Frédéric Phélippeaux, Marquis de Maurepas, carefully but not elaborately garbed, arrived in his chair at the *hôtel* in the Rue du Bac. He was admitted there without delay, and Fouchelet's answer to the suave inquiry for Mme. de Châteauroux was:

"Will Monsieur le Marquis do madame the honor to ascend to madame's bedroom?"

The Marquis, very much put out, did madame that honor.

Mme. de Châteauroux was dressed and lying back in a deep arm-chair. To accentuate her pallor and the fever-flush, she wore a *négligé* of red, and over her knees was thrown a velvet robe of the same color. In his first glimpse of her the minister noted all of this, and distinguished the affectation from the reality. He perceived his disadvantage, and began at once to calculate how far he might try her strength without inducing tears, before which he was as helpless as any man.

"Monsieur, I am charmed to behold you again."

"And I, madame, am desolated to find you not perfectly well."

There was a little pause. The Marquis anticipated being asked to sit down. Madame seemed to forget this courtesy. So, to his chagrin, Maurepas continued to stand, concealing his awkwardness and his ill-humor as best he might. At least the Duchess took no notice of his discomfort.

"Madame, his Majesty commanded my appearance before you. Doubtless there was a reason, of which, however, I am entirely ignorant. There was a hint on the King's part of a reconciliation necessary between us. I did not understand the use of the word. Have we, then, need for reconciliation?"

He spoke with a smile which annoyed madame, not for the first time. "Monsieur, last evening his Majesty was here to request my return to Versailles, and the resumption of my duties as lady of the palace of the Queen. This, on certain conditions, I am willing to do. You will, however, readily perceive how impossible it would be for me to return while at Versailles dwells the man who brought about my dismissal from Metz, in August. Do you not agree with me?"

"And if I do?" queried Maurepas, warily, doubtful of her point.

"If you do, monsieur! Will you, then, exile yourself on my arrival?"

"Exile myself? Pardon me, I do not understand you."

"I ask you, monsieur, if it was not you who wrote the letter of dismissal from Metz—that one delivered to me by d'Argenson?"

"Ah! I understand now. No, madame, I can freely say that I had nothing to do with your dismissal in any way. I had not dreamed that I was suspected of it."

Madame lay back, knitting her brows. The man before her had unquestionably told the truth. She knew that as much from his indifferent manner as from the lack of protestations in his denial. At first disappointed, the Duchess became, after a moment's reflection, intensely curious.

"Who, then, was it?" she cried, at last.

A smile broadened Maurepas' lips. His eyebrows went up, and his shoulders were lifted a hair's-breadth. "Madame—how should I know?"

"Ah, peste! In the same way that the whole court must know! Truly, I should be a fool to go back to Versailles ignorant of the name of him who had sought to ruin me. Every one would be laughing behind my back. Monsieur le Marquis, you may either answer my question or return to the King the message that I shall, after all, remain here."

"Madame—this is beyond my province. I am quite innocent of evil intent towards you. What others have done is not my concern." Maurepas spoke urgently. He saw himself getting into such difficulties as a diplomatic man dreads most.

Madame was angry. "You have heard what I say. You shall abide by it. Tell me—or go."

Maurepas sought his snuff-box agitatedly, and took a large pinch. On one side stood the anger of the King; on the other the life-enmity of a man who had before climbed gallantly out of deeper difficulties than the one into which the reinstallation of madame would throw him—Louis Armand du Plessis, grand-nephew of the greatest cardinal. And now was he, Maurepas, reduced to trusting to a woman's word? Must he sue for that? Twice he paced the room from door to windows and back again, saw no help during the distance, and finally, disgusted with himself, waived lack of invitation, drew a chair to the Duchess' side, and sat carefully down.

"Mme. de Châteauroux—listen. I am unfortunately placed. I am anxious to do you the favor you ask; and yet, for political reasons, I am unwilling to incur the displeasure of a powerful man by allowing it to be known that it was I who informed you of his lack of devotion to your cause. You perceive this?"

The Duchess looked thoughtful. The words had been crisply spoken, and had betrayed none of Maurepas' real discomfiture. "Certainly," said she.

"Well, then, regretfully but necessarily, I must impose certain conditions under which, only, will I consent to divulge this matter to you."

"What are the conditions?"

"Ah! They are neither unreasonable nor difficult, madame. As soon as you re-enter Versailles his Majesty will send to you—as he informed me himself—a list of the courtiers' names; which you will have the privilege of revising. Now, madame, if you will give me your word that this man whose identity I am going to reveal shall be dismissed from Versailles simply by means of that list and not with any marked indignity, if you will also assure me that I shall never be mentioned as concerned in the affair in any way, then, madame, I am but too delighted to enlighten you."

There was a pause. La Châteauroux considered. Maurepas, his undiplomatic proposition made, philosophically took snuff. Fortunately, the times when one must place confidence in a woman were rare. They— His incipient meditations were, however, interrupted.

"Monsieur le Marquis—"

"Madame!"

"I agree to your conditions. I give my word."

"You have reflected well?"

"I have reflected. Quick! The man!"

"Richelieu, madame."

"Oh!—Ah!—Why did I not see it before!"

With such speed did madame run the whole gamut of evidence: the last morning at Metz; Richelieu's absence from the rooms; his imperturbability before Chartres; her letters since dismissal scantily answered, and, some of them, not at all; his failure to visit her since the return; and then, last night, Louis' uneasiness at her curiosity. Yes. It was but too plain. Richelieu, King's favorite, her own mentor, had turned traitor at last.

"Ah! The villain! The wretch! The traitor! The imbecile! Never again shall he see me at Versailles! Monsieur, will you pour me a glass of water there?"

Upon the little table at her side stood a high pitcher and a small silver goblet. Maurepas hastened to comply with the request, and, as he handed her the cup, he noted how eagerly she drank, how bright was the flush on her cheek, how transparent the hand that she held to her face; and then the rather grim question came to him whether, after all, Richelieu's banishment would endure very long. But the thought was only transitory. After all, a woman of twenty-seven, strong of body and stronger of spirit, is not carried off at the very summit of her career by an intermittent fever. Thus, when she returned the empty cup to the King's minister, and their glances met for a second, he read in her face resolution and to spare to carry her through much more than such a sickness as her present one.

"Have no fear of me, monsieur. I shall not betray you. Will you accept my gratitude?"

Maurepas bowed courteously. "When shall we at Versailles have the opportunity of welcoming you and Mme. de Lauraguais back again?"

The Duchess looked quickly up with a flicker of amusement in her eyes at his elaborate tone. "I do not know. I am, at present, as you may perceive, scarcely able to be moved so far or to enter upon my week of duties as lady of the Queen, even should I reach Versailles safely. I must wait here till I am stronger. Till that time—M. de Richelieu may relieve the King's ennui. Must you retire so soon?"

Maurepas was evidently upon the point of departure. "My—the affair between us is concluded, is it not? May I take to his Majesty the word of our renewed friendship?"

Mme. de Châteauroux held out her hand, and, while the minister bent over to kiss it, she smiled down on the powdered head with a look in her eyes that he, could he have seen it, would have considered with something like apprehension. "Our friendship is ratified, M. de Maurepas. *Au revoir.*"

"I shall be the first to welcome you at Versailles."

"Thank you. With Maurepas for one's friend, who could dread anything?"

"You flatter me too much. *Au revoir.*"

So, with a final salute, and a grim smile at himself for his undeniable defeat at a woman's hands, Maurepas concluded his task, and, with relief at his heart, crossed the threshold of the dwelling of the favorite of France.

CHAPTER VIII

Deep Waters



THE King and his companion returned to Versailles on Friday, as quietly as they had left it three days before; and it was probable that most of the court was unaware that his Majesty had been invisible for any but usual reasons—exclusive hunting, and intimate suppers, somewhere, with some one. The little circle of royal companions who selected what details of gossip might cross the threshold of the Salle du Conseil or the Petits Cours Intérieurs into the Œil-de-Bœuf were extremely discreet. For days Rumor, always with the name of la Châteauroux as a refrain for her verses, flapped over Paris and Versailles, chanting vigorously. Keepers of journals, d'Argenson and the worthy de Luynes, wrote wildly, contradicting one day all that had been said on the day before, and which, in turn, would be falsified to-morrow. Was Madame la Duchesse really to be reinstated, or, like her sister predecessor, to be kept on there in Paris in sackcloth and regret ever after? This question no one definitely answered. Mme. d'Etioles, now and then in the palace, more often away under the close surveillance of her husband, trembled between anticipation and despair. There was another at court in much the same way. This was Richelieu, who, for the first time since his début, living as he did at the very door of the kingdom's adytum, was still outside the pale of knowledge. Daily he scanned the face of Maurepas, a suavely blank space, which hinted tantalizingly at how much lay behind it. The King's demeanor was no less incomprehensible. He was generally sulky; seemed to

have settled down into a routine; attended four war councils and two of finance, to Machault's terror, in one week; ate little; drank much; was seen often in unofficial but very private conference with Maurepas; and now and then treated Richelieu with such open and kindly affection that fainting hope revived in the Duke's heart, and he ceased numbering days.

As a matter of fact, la Châteauroux continued to be ill; for a king's favor will not banish malaria in one day. Mme. de Lauraguais was growing intensely anxious to be safe at Versailles again. The Duchess, curiously enough, was infinitely less impatient. Perhaps she knew too well what Versailles meant to experience unmixed joy at the prospect of the return. Not till physical strength was hers again did she care to go into the inevitable maze of intrigue, enmity, and deceit which one entered by the door to the little apartments. Dr. Quesnay, of Méré, a friend of Mme. d'Etioles, none the less a good physician and a bluffly honest man, attended her in Paris assiduously. Under his care the favorite certainly improved, day by day, till, on the 4th of the last month of the year, four messages flew over the road, two from Paris to Versailles, and two from the palace there to the Rue du Bac. And that night the King did not sleep, but was, nevertheless, late to mass on the morning of the fifth, when a new day and a new era dawned for the Œil-de-Bœuf and for the history of France.

The 5th of December fell on Sunday, and proved a day dull enough for all the court. For once their Majesties dined together in the Salle du Grand Couvert, as Louis XIV. would have had them do. But the King did not appear at his consort's salon in the evening. He merely informed her that it was his pleasure that she should hold a special reception two nights later, on the evening of the 7th, at which he would be present; why, he did not explain. Though it would be the evening before the Feast of the Conception, and therefore a time for extra devotions, Marie Leczinska gratefully acceded to her husband's request,

delighted at anything which should bring him into her rooms. In the evening Louis supped in the small apartments with a select company of privileged gentlemen, his pages of the Court, Maurepas, and d'Argenson.

"It is a feast of nine, my friends—the old Roman number. Let us, then, be classic in our drinking and our conversation," observed his Majesty, with unusual loquacity.

"And is it to gods or goddesses that we chant our praises, Sire? Do we look to Olympus or—Cythera?" demanded Maurepas, slyly.

The King did not at once reply. Finally, with a smile peculiar to himself, he glanced at his favorite. "You shall choose the toast, du Plessis. Jove or Venus?"

Richelieu, ignorant of a cause, was at a loss to read the subtlety. "Venus, Sire," he replied, raising a glass to the candle-light before he drank.

"Merely the goddess in abstract?" murmured de Sauvré. "Surely her present living counterpart were better worthy the wine."

"Sire, will you not christen the toast?"

"Is it necessary? There is but one." The King negligently lifted his glass, while only de Coigny of all the tableful breathed normally. "Marie Leczinska, your Queen, gentlemen!"

Each face fell slightly. Glasses were emptied without a word, and the silence continued as the dishes of the first course were passed.

"These birds are very fine, but there is no venison," remarked Louis, helping himself to his favorite fillet of partridge.

"The last hunt was four days ago," observed Penthievre.

The King looked quickly up. "Quite true. The councils have demanded me. But I am arranging a hunt—a large hunt. What meetings to-morrow, d'Argenson?"

"An important one, Sire, at which M. Machault reads a report of the taxes of the Navarraise clergy during the last quarter—"

"Ah, yes. You and Machault are diligent enough there. But the day after—the 7th? I do not wish to be at council on that day."

"There will be none, Sire," responded the young man, obediently, the interest dying out of his eyes; and Maurepas, with some amusement, watched him begin to crumble his bread.

"That is very well. On Tuesday, gentlemen, we will follow the hounds through Sénart, retire to Choisy in the afternoon, and return to Versailles in time for her Majesty's salon in the evening. At Choisy, gentlemen, I shall myself prepare a dish, an especial one, which Mouthier* has created for me, and in the making of which the greatest delicacy is necessary. It is to be a *vol-au-vent royal*, à la—the last of the name is not important. It will be a triumph of art."

"Shall you prepare it for the company, or—for one person, Sire?" queried de Gêvres.

"There will be more for the party. This one—is—particular."

"For her Majesty, without doubt," murmured d'Épernon, smiling.

Maurepas and the King exchanged glances, and Richelieu, intercepting the look, started suddenly, not recovering his poise till de Gêvres had read into his mind.

"Sire, this one person whom you so honor returns in the party to Versailles—is it not so?" asked de Sauvré, bravely.

"Naturally her Majesty returns to Versailles."

"She holds a salon that evening," muttered de Gêvres to de Coigny, who sat next him.

"Who?—The Queen?" whispered the marshal in his turn.

"I don't know. We are not really speaking of the Queen?"

"D'Argenson, you hold the supper-list for Choisy. I—a—would speak with you about invitations later this

* Louis' favorite chef.

evening. You will be in the Salle des Pendules at an early hour."

D'Argenson bowed.

The supper-list? Deborah was upon that. Richelieu breathed deeply. Was he wrong in his fears? And yet, was it possible that this secrecy should be used in the installation of a new favorite? Certainly none at that table except Maurepas was any more enlightened concerning this affair than he was himself. He scanned the faces around him. De Sauv^{ré} and Coigny were unconcerned. Veiled curiosity was perceptible in the eyes of d'Ep^{ernon} and Penthi^{èvre}. D'Argenson, like a very young diplomat, appeared reflective, and inclined to conjecture by analysis the real object of his forthcoming interview with the King. And de Gêvres, whose face was invariably set in an expression of bored indifference, had now something in the line of mouth and eyes that gave his countenance a suggestion of alertness and satisfaction. Richelieu concluded his scrutiny with even less hope than he had begun it. However, since the table were eating with good appetite, he made shift to follow, and forget himself as far as might be in a well-seasoned ragout of pigeon.

"*Vol-au-vent* is certainly a charming dish!" cried Louis, presently, harking back to his favorite pursuit.

"And of what is it made, Sire? Is it—sweet?"

"Ah, Sauv^{ré}, that is a secret. You shall learn it on Tuesday. Bring an appetite with you from the hunt. Perhaps you may even assist in its manufacture. I told Mouthier that I would have no cooks meddle with my dish, but that my good friends would assist me in the kitchen."

"We are honored," came the little chorus.

Louis inclined his head.

"Your Majesty has—a—been making candies, of late," observed d'Ep^{ernon}, with intended malice.

The King coughed. "A few—chocolates. I have been experimenting with a new *fondant*. It is delightful."

"Who gets them?—the de Mailly?" whispered de Sauvré to Richelieu.

The Duke shook his head helplessly. "I have never seen any there. I do not think that it is she." Again he looked round the circle, and again was Maurepas' the only intelligent face present. Richelieu bit his lip in anger; but, as the second course and much wine now made its appearance, the conversation turned to less ambiguous topics, and the drinking, with all its conviviality, began. Many were the ladies to whom Louis deigned to raise his glass, the Countess de Mailly being among the first of them. And when, an hour later, the nine gentlemen rose from the table, the cares and fears of all of them were lighter. After a bottle of old Tokay, a tender partridge, and a successful epigram, who would not rise above a dread of the intrigues of a fickle, unhappy King, whose best hours were spent with men, and to whom, at such times, women seemed unimportant enough?

On being dismissed from their liege, several of the gentlemen departed towards the salon of the Queen, to join the promenade and see the newly presented ladies. One or two left the palace for appointments in the town. Richelieu, out of spirits, and glad to be alone, went off to the King's bedroom, where, as first gentleman of the chamber, he ousted Bachelier, and himself prepared the room for the grand *couche*. Next to this bedroom, towards the front of the palace, its windows opening upon the little Court of Marbles, was the Salle des Pendules. Here, after the supper, according to his Majesty's command, came young d'Argenson, with the list of courtiers eligible for Choisy suppers in his pocket. The King did not keep his youthful minister waiting. After a few smiling words with Maurepas, who was now blessing Fate for that past interview and "reconciliation" in November, Louis hurried from the Salle des Croisades up the corridor, into the Salle du Jeu, and so to that of the clocks.

"Ah! You await me, monsieur. Your promptness is gratifying."

D'Argenson made obeisance.

The King passed across to the window, and stood with his hand on the sill, looking out across the court at the lights in the opposite rooms. "D'Argenson, have you, beside the Choisy list, one of the entire Court and all the families here represented?"

"There is such a list, Sire, but it is in the keeping of M. de Berryer. At your command, I will obtain it from him."

The King hesitated, seemed to reflect for a moment, and then, with his eyes still fixed outside the room, answered: "Yes, that were as well. De Berryer is in Paris, I believe. And, well, Monsieur le Comte—" the King turned and faced him—"I have a mission for you to-morrow."

D'Argenson bowed.

"You will leave for Paris, at an hour as early as you find convenient. Arrived at the city, go at once to the Prefecture, obtain the written list of the Court from de Berryer—I will send you an order to-night—and proceed with that to the Rue du Bac, numéro —."

In the candle-light young d'Argenson started violently.

His Majesty smiled. "Yes. You will find there Mme. de Châteauroux; and to her you will present the list. She will be so gracious as to read it through and to strike from it the names of those who have not the happiness to please her. In the afternoon you will return to me with the revised list, which—um—I shall put into execution on Wednesday, probably. That is all, monsieur. I wish you good-evening."

The Count was about to leave the apartment, when the King himself turned upon his red heel and abruptly left the room. D'Argenson, with a new horizon to his world, moved weakly to the side of the room, and sank upon a tabouret just as the door opposite to him swung open, and Richelieu, his task completed, appeared from the King's bedroom.

"Hola, Marc! What is the matter? You need rouge," he said, wearily.

"I should prefer a glass of Berkley's English gin," responded the Count, without animation.

"What is it? You have seen his Majesty?"

"Yes."

"Well—your news?"

D'Argenson looked about him nervously. Then, rising, he moved over and spoke in Richelieu's ear. "The new dish—*vol-au-vent*—is to be à la Châteauroux. Tomorrow she revises the Court list."

"Mon Dieu!" Richelieu whispered the exclamation, and raised one of his slender hands to his forehead. "What to do? You—you also are in dread, Marc?"

D'Argenson shrugged, with a pitiful attempt at indifference. "I carried her the message of dismissal from Metz."

"Ah!" Richelieu hesitated for a second. Then he said, softly: "When will the revisal of the list be carried into effect at Court? Do you know?"

"On Wednesday."

"There is, then, a day—of grace."

"One. The King hunts. We shall all be at Choisy. Madame joins us there, you know, and returns with us—for the salon of the Queen."

"Naturally."

"What shall you do? Resign your post now?"

Richelieu was silent, and his face looked drawn. This sensation of helplessness was very new to him. He seemed to hesitate. Then, after a few moments he said, slowly: "No, I shall wait. One thing—will you do me a favor?"

"What is that? There are few enough in my power now."

"To-morrow evening, when you return from Paris, show me the list."

"Monsieur, I cannot seek you. If we should meet—by chance—"

Richelieu bowed. "Certainly. It is all I ask. If we should meet by chance."

"In that case, I will do so. At any rate, I will—tell you."

"My thanks are yours."

Both bowed. Thereupon d'Argenson would have turned away, but Richelieu suddenly held out his right hand.

"It is no ordinary affair," he said.

The young Count frankly accepted the offer. Their hands clasped firmly for an instant, and the moment of brotherhood did both good.

"Do you go, now, to the salon of her Majesty?"

"I had thought not, to-night; but I have changed my mind."

"I will come with you."

"And to-morrow morning," added the Duke, as they left the room together—"to-morrow morning, after mass, I shall go to the *Ceil-de-Bœuf* and remain there till you return in the evening."

"Why do that? You will gain nothing there."

"I shall gain atmosphere. It reeks of the Court, as a chandler reeks of tallow. I shall like—to take it away with me."

D'Argenson smiled faintly; and then in silence they passed into the Queen's antechamber.

Marie Leczinska's salon was not so brilliant as the one of two weeks before. It was, however, sufficiently filled to put one in proper mood, without danger of ruining hoops; which, after all, was a slight relief. Both Claude and Deborah were here to-night, never together, but also never very far apart. Mme. de Mailly had become one of the most-sought-after persons in the Court, and her husband, while he conformed always to the conventions by not approaching her in public, was, nevertheless, aware of every person who spoke to her of an evening, heard every compliment paid her by men, and a good many of the enviously malicious speeches that were beginning to be made about her by the women. To-night Richelieu, on entering the salon, made his way at once to Deborah's side. She had been speaking with the Marquis de Tessé, while the Prince de Soubise hovered near, thinking up a suitable gal-

lantry with which to pounce upon her. Richelieu adroitly forestalled him, however, and reached her first, well pleased at being able to do so. The Duke was moving at random, for he had found no plan of possible salvation yet. There only lay in his mind a dim notion that, if safety should be his at the eleventh hour, it would come to him through this same Deborah. The idea was surely instinctive, for it had small reason in it. What could a little colonial, what could any woman—the poor, pale Queen herself—do against Claude's cousin, the reinstated favorite, the great Duchesse de Châteauroux, and that gently spoken, inflexible, indomitable "*Je le veux*" which Louis of France had used? True, Deborah had become a de Mailly, had been much noticed by the King, and was talked of in peculiar whispers by all the Court. Nevertheless, what so precarious as her position? What favors might she ask? None. And yet, here was falling Richelieu hurrying to no Maurepas, no Machault, or Berryer, or any powered man, but to the side of her who had been born, eighteen years before, in a wide-roofed Virginia farm-house.

"Madame, do you go to the Opéra to-morrow night?" he asked, idly.

"I do not know, Monsieur le Duc. What is it to be?"

"'Jephté,' I have heard—Montclair, you know. Pé-lissier and Thévénard are to sing, and the ballet in that piece is delightful. Sallé and Nicolet will lead it."

"Oh, I should like to go! I have seen Mlle. Sallé—last week. And Mme. Péliissier also. She has such a voice!"

"Will you, then, you and monsieur, do me the honor to occupy my box? We will have Mme. de Coigny and the abbé—"

"Oh no! Please—" Deborah began, impulsively, but, realizing what she was doing, stopped short in embarrassment.

"Pardon me, I did not know that you and the little Victorine were—uncongenial. Whom shall I ask?"

"Any one—any one, of course. Mme. de Coigny, by all means, monsieur."

Richelieu looked at her curiously, and might have spoken his thought had not Claude at that moment moved somewhat closer to them, and the Duke, therefore, turned to him. "I am just praying Madame la Comtesse to arrange a party for me for the Opéra to-morrow evening. Will you not join us?"

"Thank you, I am engaged to St. Severin for a supper and the Français. Madame, if she has no other engagement, will be delighted to accept your kindness, I do not doubt," returned Claude, pleasantly.

Deborah turned a half-wistful glance towards her husband, but was met with a gentle smile of refusal that suddenly changed her manner.

"Monsieur le Duc, I shall be but too happy to accompany you, if you will arrange the party. I do not think that I know—quite how."

Richelieu bowed his thanks, and looked long into her honest gray eyes. "I will call for you in my coach at seven, madame, if you will permit. I bid you—*au revoir*." With a bow such as he would have given to a superior in rank, he moved away, making room for M. de Soubise, who had settled upon his compliment, and was itching to have it out before it should lose flavor with silent rehearsal.

Richelieu did not remain much longer in the room. Towards the end of the promenade his Majesty, his dog Charlotte under one arm, unexpectedly made his appearance, negligent in manner, intent, as it seemed, on speaking with Deborah. Richelieu saw the King with a new feeling. It was the first time that he had ever thought of Louis as holding interests foreign to his own. Hitherto they had been allies in every council, in every amusement. Now, at last, in desire and intention, they were separated, and it was a woman who stood between them. Richelieu shook himself. His thoughts were becoming bitter. Cutting short an exchange of graces with Mme. de Mirepoix, he left the rooms, and, informing the grand chamberlain that he would be unable to assist at the royal *couche* that evening, sought his own apartment, and was put to bed by his

valet, not to sleep, but to plan, to twist, to turn, and still, with a new, unconquerable dread, to anticipate the morrow.

Morning came late. Richelieu, in fact, rose with the dawn, for the King was always roused at eight, and it was the duty of the first gentleman, since he had been absent on the previous evening, to bring water in which his Majesty should wash, and to put the royal dressing-gown about the royal shoulders. Louis was in a quizzical mood, and tried, rather unkindly, to play with the feelings of his favorite courtier. Richelieu's *sang-froid* was imperturbable, however. He was now bound in honor to his own code to exhibit no trace of the feeling which, last night, he had almost been guilty of betraying, through nervous uncertainty.

The King dressed, he completed his prayers, despatched the early entries, and, when he was finally installed with his chocolate and eggs in the council-hall, where the matter of the Navarraise taxes was later to be taken up, Richelieu himself partook of a light breakfast, and then made a dignified progress towards the room of rooms—the *Œil-de-Bœuf*—where, possibly, his fate might, by accident, be already known. On his way through the halls of the gods and the grand gallery, he met not a few with the same destination in mind. Certainly none could have told, from his measured morning greetings, his offers or acceptance of snuff, his lightly witty words, what a tumult of anxiety raged within him. By this time d'Argenson must be entering Paris. Did any besides himself know that errand on which he went? More, did any surmise its result? How long had he still to remain in this, his home? Hours? Years? Was his dread, after all, reasonable? Had any one divulged to her his part in the Metz affair? True, it was Court property; but—ah! he had been very rash in the Alsatian city. Never should he forget the morning when he had cried out, before all the salon there, the news that Louis had grown worse in the last hours. Here, even now, like a ghost conjured up by memory, was young Monseigneur de Chartres, coming out from the Bull's-eye. Du Plessis,

as he saluted, quivered. Then, with a gallant recuperation, he smiled to himself, and passed on into that little room of fate.

Considering that the hour was before morning mass, the *Œil-de-Bœuf* was unusually thronged. Both men and women were there, and the place hummed with conversation. For the first moment or two Richelieu held off from the company, judging, by means of his trained ear and his long experience, the nature of the gossip from the key of the conglomerate sound. It varied to-day, now high with laughter, now more ominous, again medium with uncertainty. The omen was good. It boded no definite evils of knowledge—yet. Thereupon the Duke permitted himself to be accosted by M. de Pont-de-Vesle, of the King's formal household, an old man, tall and lean, wearing his wig *à la* Catogan, and with a miniature of Ninon de l'Enclos in his snuff-box.

"Good-morning, Monsieur the Grand-Nephew! Whom does the King receive to-day during the little hours?" With the question he proffered snuff.

"Thank you. Ah! You use civet. The King does not receive to-day. He is in council. Machault reads the report," returned Richelieu, very civilly, considering the fact that Pont-de-Vesle had addressed him in the form which, of all others, he most disliked.

"Ah! When his Majesty has not hunted for a week we are all forlorn. When he takes to council—Ciel!—it is like the beginning of a reign of Maintenon. How do you perfume your snuff?"

"Oh, it is something aromatic, composed for me by Castaigne, of Paris. Sandalwood, cinnamon, attar—I forget the rest. Do me the honor to try it."

With ceremonious solemnity Pont-de-Vesle accepted a pinch, just as young d'Aiguillon came smilingly up to them. "Good-morning, Monsieur le Duc! Do you bring news, or come for it?"

"I come for it, my dear Count," returned Richelieu. "What do they talk of in the *Œil* to-day?"

"One subject only."

"So bad as that? Who has committed it? I am all ignorance!"

"You mistake. There is no fresh scandal. It is—"

"Women," put in Pont-de-Vesle, sourly.

"Oh! What women?"

"That is more difficult. There are many rumors. It is said in Paris that—Mme. de Châteauroux is to come back."

The Duke raised his eyebrows. "Paris! That is a curious news-mart. What says Versailles?"

"Oh!—" Young d'Aiguillon stopped, assuming a mysterious expression.

"We say," interrupted the other, quickly, "that there are other candidates who would please better."

"For instance?"

"Well, for one, the little American, Mme. de Mailly. But, parbleu! the post must not remain forever in one family! I think that this girl should never have been taken up. What is her blood? Her husband swears to five generations; but—the husband!—Pouf!"

"But the Queen was delighted with her, and—the King will be," cried the young Count, pleasantly.

"Who is your candidate, monsieur?" demanded Richelieu of Pont-de-Vesle.

"Mine? Oh—that is a delicate question. Nevertheless, I think 'tis time we had a woman of station. Now, Mme. de Grammont—"

"Heavens!"

"An *étiquette*? You are mad, monsieur!"

"Not at all. I protest—"

"Is she, then, so willing to accept the post?"

Pont-de-Vesle stiffened. "Oh, as to that—I cannot say. She is spoken of—not to."

"Ah, well," decided d'Aiguillon, sagely, "after all, it will be the ladies, not we, who will settle matters for themselves."

"As for me, I should like to find a woman who would refuse the post,"

And with this Richelieu, who could see no advantage in continuing the conversation, saluted his companions of the moment and passed on to others, whose talk, however, did not much vary from the foregoing style. By the time that the hour for mass arrived, and the Court wended a leisurely way towards Mansard's chapel, the favorite Duke was comforted in mind and heart. He hoped; though why, and on what grounds, he could not have told. The *Œil-de-Bœuf* was densely ignorant of the King's real project. He, Richelieu, knew it only too well. La Châteauroux *was* to come back. Paris knew. How, then, had he any right, or any reason, to hope? And, with this logic, the shadow of despair came over him again, and through it, as through a veil, he heard the melancholy intoning of priests' voices and the monotonous chanting of the choir.

Dinner passed, it were difficult to say how, and the afternoon began. There was attendance on his Majesty, who alternately played with three dogs and sulked because there was nothing further to do; a few moments at English tea with the circle of Mme. de Boufflers; an enforced interchange of polite hostilities with de Gêvres, in the Salle d'Apollon; and then, some little time after dusk began to fall, Richelieu made his way down to the landing of the Staircase of the Ambassadors, out of sight of the Suisses and the King's guards, in the great vestibule below. He was intensely nervous. With each beat of his heart a new shock thrilled unpleasantly over him. D'Argenson must be returning soon now, and must come in this way. Minutes only remained before he should know the end. The lights in the great candelabra at the stair-top illumined the vast, lifeless ascent but dimly. Dreamily Richelieu thought of the pageants that he had seen upon this stair; wondered, indeed, if he should see such again. Before great dread, time itself flies. It seemed no half-hour, but a few seconds only, to the waiting man before a darkly cloaked figure entered into the vestibule, passed the Suisses in silence, and came, with wearily

dragging steps, up the stairs. Half-way up, the candle-light gleamed for an instant into his pallid face. Richelieu's heart quivered downward as he stepped out from his sheltering pillar and stood before young d'Argenson.

"Well, then—you return."

D'Argenson shot a look into the other's face. "For a day," he replied, without much expression, his lip curling slightly.

"Then she—"

"Struck me off at once."

Richelieu drew a heavy breath. "And I?" he asked, softly.

"And you—also."

It had come, then. The two men stood still on the stairs, facing each other for an unnoted time. Then Richelieu smiled. "You are wet with the rain, Marc. When you leave the King, come to my rooms. There you will find Grachet and some hot rum. I must make my toilet now. I have a party to-night—for the Opéra."

D'Argenson stared. "Mon Dieu!" he muttered to himself, "we diplomats have not such training!"

CHAPTER IX

The Duke Swims



SOMETHING over an hour after d'Argenson's return, Richelieu, in full dress, glittering with jewels and orders, left the palace in his coach, bound for the Rue d'Anjou. He was committing the curious *faux-pas* of being too early.

It was barely half past six when he left the Boulevard de la Reine, whence it was less than five minutes to his destination. But Richelieu, under his gayety, his frequent laughs, and his flood of brilliant conversation, so witty that d'Epernon, seeing him in his rooms, fancied that he had been drinking, was desperate. Until a month ago he had not realized how much his life meant to him. He was now forty-eight years old, and, since his fourteenth year, he had never lived out of the atmosphere of the Court. That atmosphere was part of him. It clung about his every gesture and about his speech, punctuated as that still was with the low patois in which he had delighted as a young rake. His garments and his wigs were of set and fashion so inimitable that the Jew to whom he sold them realized a profit equal to their original cost in selling them to members of the *haute bourgeoisie* with Court ambitions. It was Richelieu who had made Louis XV. and his Court what they were. It was Richelieu who was at all times King of the King's house. To the last inch of what soul he had, he was imbued with Court manners, Court love, Court lordliness. And now—now, at the simple word of a woman of yellow hair and twenty-seven years—his name was struck from the Court list! He had been in straits before, but never one

wherein he was so apparently helpless. This was incredible, monstrous, impossible—true. Yes, the great Richelieu was falling. Whom to turn to? Berryer? Machault? The King himself? No. Instinct, with one of its incomprehensible turns, was leading him, unresisted, to that house in the Rue d'Anjou where dwelt a little girl from the American colonies, with her husband, the cousin of the woman who thought to ruin him.

Unable to rid himself of this curious notion, Richelieu alighted from his vehicle in the Rue d'Anjou, was admitted by the porter, and proceeded up the stairs to the de Mailly apartment. Claude was not there. Richelieu knew that from his own statement. Madame alone was within. How much depended on the next few moments the Duke could not surmise. Nevertheless, he gently tried the door from the hall, without knocking. It was open. Noiselessly he entered the antechamber, and, crossing it, would have passed into the salon but for a sight which halted him on its threshold, in the shadow of the hangings.

The room before him was half lighted, and contained one person, who stood motionless, her back towards the antechamber, on the other side of the room. It was Deborah, fully dressed for the evening, if Richelieu judged correctly; but in an attitude which threatened to destroy the elegant simplicity of her coiffeur. She was in front of a little cabinet which stood against the wall beside the mantel-piece, her two elbows, in their cloudy lace ruffles, resting upon one of the shelves. Her powdered head lay upon her arms; and now and again her slight frame could be seen to quiver with the depth of a long-drawn sob. What was the matter? What was she doing? What was it that the cupboard contained? Richelieu wondered and waited. Then he was struck with a welcome notion. Here was she in a sorrowful, therefore tender, mood. He alone was near her. Their growing friendship—why not cement it with a delicate passage, delicately arranged? Who so able to manage this successfully as Richelieu? For Richelieu believed that he knew all women.

Silently, then, though without especial effort to make no sound, he began moving towards her by leisurely degrees. She heard nothing, and seemed to feel no presence near her. Indeed, at that moment she was very far away, among the memories which the bottles had conjured up for her—ghosts of many things and people: home, Virginia, Dr. Carroll, Sir Charles, black Sambo, the warm sunlight, the river, and the free, wild woods that were her own.

“Chère Comtesse!”

The words were so delicately murmured that they could not startle her. She only lifted her head like one awaking from sleep and looked slowly about. Seeing Richelieu at her side, and remembering the evening, she suddenly straightened, forced herself back into the present, and began, with an effort: “Pardon, I beg of you, mons—”

“Ah! You to demand pardon of me? Impossible! I am early to-night, dear friend. We have much time. See—you grieve for something—some one. You will confide the grief to me? You will accept my sympathy?”

As Deborah looked for an instant into the large, limpid brown eyes of the man before her, her own fell. Her mood also changed. She was suddenly inclined to be on her guard with this man, whom she knew best as Claude’s mentor.

“My grief was for many persons and things. ’Twas for home, my own people, my old friends—there—across the water—” and she pointed whimsically into the cabinet at her former treasures.

Richelieu, with unfeigned curiosity, moved towards the shelf. Picking up one of the bottles, with its neatly written label, he examined it, not very closely, his eyes questioning the girl before him. Deborah, with an absent smile, looked at the crystal phial and its white, oily contents, with the inch of gray sediment at the bottom.

“That is from the *Spartium scoparium*,” she said.

“Really?” muttered Richelieu, considerably puzzled. The turn which the scene was taking, if not as he had

planned it, was none the less interesting. "And is this some new cordial or liqueur which you and Claude have discovered together?"

"Heaven forbid!" was the half-laughing, half-serious reply.

"Eh!—You mean—"

"Thirty drops have been fatal. M-medicine and—alkaloids were my tastes, sir, when I had my still-room."

"And these," the Duke pointed to the contents of the shelf—"all these are—medicines—or alkaloids?"

"They are both," she replied, with a hint of troubled hesitation in her tone.

"Tell me of them. I am interested," he asked, quietly.

She shook her head. "There is not time. Besides—"

"Ah! And these!—Now these are, indeed, curious, Mme. de Mailly! What are they?"

In the rear of the shelf he had spied the box of fungi. Drawing it towards him, he took from it one of the shrivelled brown things and examined it on all sides. Deborah watched him in silence, her feeling of uneasiness growing.

"What is it?" he repeated, smiling.

"It is the *Amanita muscaria*—poison mushrooms, that we use sometimes in Maryland for fly-poison."

"And how do they kill?"

"Monsieur, will you not put them up? I think it is time to go."

"Instantly, madame; but—tell me first how they kill."

He was regarding her in such apparent amusement that, for the moment, she was nettled by the suspicion of mockery. "They are now five months old—what I have there. But two of them would kill a grown man to-day. There is no perceptible effect till from four to nine hours after eating. Then—then, monsieur," she said, dryly, "the agony is not pretty to behold."

"Um—and do they taste?"

"No. They are like leather now. Will you replace them in the cupboard, monsieur?—and we will speak of other things."

Without further protest Richelieu obeyed her, putting the fungi carefully away, replacing the *scoparium* among the other bottles, and closing the little door of the cabinet after him. Its key was in the lock. He turned it. And then—then—Deborah was wrapping a cloudy veil about her head; she was turned from him—he suddenly drew the key from the lock and slipped it into his pocket. It was instinct that bade him do it—perhaps. Five minutes later a coach rolled away from the house in the Rue d'Anjou and entered upon the Paris road.

"Who—are to be with us this evening?" asked Deborah, as she settled back in a corner of the roomy vehicle.

"Marshal Coigny, Mme. d'Egmont, Mme. de Chaulnes, and d'Aiguillon will join us at the opera. Afterwards supper will be served us in my salon at Versailles. These long drives—I trust they will not fatigue you. Were it not for the hunt to-morrow, we might have remained overnight in Paris. As it is, however, it will be necessary to return. Will you be at Choisy to-morrow afternoon, when the hunt goes there for its famous refreshment?"

"I was asked to go. Claude—" She stopped suddenly.

"He did not wish it?" asked Richelieu, gently.

"I am going," was the unexpected reply.

In the darkness Richelieu smiled.

"Jephté" proved to be a decided success. The opera-house was crowded, both Queen and Dauphin were present, and most of Versailles were gathered into the badly lighted and wretchedly aired building. Richelieu's party were found to be fairly congenial, and the Duke, who had exerted himself almost beyond his powers, during the drive, to banish from Deborah's thoughts the incident of the cabinet, now allowed d'Aiguillon to hold full sway over the conversation, and himself sat almost entirely silent during that part of the evening. How try to imagine the gradual trending of his thoughts? How surmise their final concentration? It is something that no mortal of inexperience has ever been able to conceive, no anthropologist capable of analyzing—that secret, stealthy working of the brain faculties round

and round one point; how they approach it nearer and nearer, retreat a little, hesitate, advance again, till the point has suddenly been reached; the idea and the will are one; determination is born.

The party of six returned, after the opera, to Versailles, in one wide-seated coach. Arrived at the palace and Richelieu's apartment within it, supper was found awaiting them; and the evening progressed with all possible gayety. Later the Maréchal de Coigny escorted Mme. de Mailly home; and, at four o'clock in the morning, long before the December dawn, Deborah Travis slept.

His Grâce de Richelieu was not so happy. Before his salon was cleared of the remains of supper and set to rights again, Grachet, his valet, had put him gently to bed, all pomaded, perfumed, silken-gowned, and capped. But the warming-pan had made the sheets too hot; and the champagne had more than usually heated his head. He turned and tossed and twisted like any mortal, the great Richelieu, for the two heavy hours which constituted his night; and it was during that time that the Determination was born. The idea and the will—the little bronze key and the desire to use it—had met. Crime, or the planning of crime, hovered there in the darkness over the heavy canopy. Satan, cloven-hoofed, laughing, reclined in a chair near his new friend. Richelieu fell gradually into a drowsy state. Strange whispers poured from his lips. Such a night he had not spent before, such would never spend again.

Morning came, finally. The Duke rose, with relief, at a little past six, and dressed by candle-light. Grachet wondered in sleepy silence as he prepared the chocolate at such an unheard-of hour, but came near to the unpardonable false step of an exclamation, when his master, toying idly with an egg, said, suddenly: "Grachet, go and ask Moutthier—his Majesty's chef—to come to me at once if he can. Rouse him, if he is not yet up."

When the man had left the room upon his unprecedented errand, Richelieu flung down his napkin and sprang to his feet. To have seen his face and heard his hoarse breathing

would have been to judge him physically in pain. He walked in great strides up and down the apartment, refusing to struggle against his impulses, crushing out the final prompting of a long-weakened Other Nature. Presently he came to a halt before his chamber door, just as Grachet re-entered, bringing with him an imposing personage, somewhat dishevelled as to wig, but attired in a very neat black suit, with waistcoat of cherry silk, and the blue ribbon of his order elaborately arranged thereon.

"M. Mouthier, my lord."

"Good-morning, Mouthier—good-morning—good-morning," observed the Duke, staring hard at the new-comer, and monotonously repeating his words. "You're early," he added, at length.

"Your Grace, in one hour, in company with my staff, I depart for Choisy," responded the great cook, with reproachful respect and something of the manner of a world-famed general announcing the opening move of the campaign to his sovereign.

"Ah—Choisy." Richelieu smiled as he drew out his words.

Grachet stared at his master, and Mouthier instantly resolved to be eccentric of a morning—if possible.

"Mouthier, you are, to-day, going to allow his Majesty to create a *vol-au-vent royal à la Châteauroux*—is it not so?"

"His Majesty has informed your Grace?"

"No. The gods whispered it. But, Mouthier, the gods refused to go further than the name. Therefore I come to you, that I may learn more of a dish which a king will prepare for a duchess. Tell me, oh, prince of thy art, is this dish of kings sweet or sour, thick or thin, cold or hot? I would match my coat to its consistency. What ingredients does it contain? Of what is it compounded?"

"Your Grace—" The cook hesitated painfully, but found his professional instinct stronger than his reverence for rank. "Your Grace—if I might be assured that Marin—had nothing to do with this affair—"

"Marin? Oh! I see! But you cannot deem Marin your rival? Mouthier, between us, Marin is a no one, a second-rate man, unfit even for the taste of M. de Soubise. How the *cordon bleu* ever came to be delivered to him—bah! Mouthier, you would not imagine me as intriguing with—with a Marin, eh?"

"Ah, Monseigneur, Monseigneur, forgive! My suspicions were base, false. Monseigneur, the *vol-au-vent royal à la Châteauroux* is a *pâté*, a round pastry case, filled with a delightful compound of—of chicken, of sweetbreads, of truffles, of cock's-combs, of mushrooms—"

"Ah! You may go, Mouthier. You may go, I say!"

Grachet stole a terrified glance at the Duke. Mouthier, cut short at the very beginning of a recitation delicious to his creative soul, looked with pathetic appeal at the great man, saw him point relentlessly to the antechamber door, with unmistakable command in his face, and so, thoroughly disappointed, and scarcely, in that disappointment, finding time to wonder, began reluctantly backing, and, still murmuring raptly, "seasoned with salt, with black butter, delicate spice, with bay-leaves, and covered with the sauce *à-la—*," disappeared through the doorway and was visible no more.

"Ah! That is settled, then. Grachet, a cloak and hat."

"M—M—Monsieur?"

"A cloak and hat! Diable! What has got you?"

The valet, stumbling with awkward haste, obeyed him. Richelieu wrapped himself in the cloak, took up the hat, and, before he left the room, tossed his man a louis d'or. "There. I am not mad, Grachet—except in giving you that, perhaps. But be silent about Mouthier. You understand?"

Gold quickens the understanding. Grachet's eyes grew bright again as he murmured quickly: "Mouthier was never here, Monsieur le Duc."

Richelieu laughed. "Very well. Have a good hunting-suit out when I return, and I will ride Graille to the meet."

Then Richelieu left his apartment and strode away through the dim, deserted corridors, carrying along with him a hollow, dreary echo. Descending the grand staircase where yesterday he had waited for d'Argenson's return, he passed the drowsy guards in the vestibule, and entered into the gray, chilly morning. It was very cold. In the night the rain had turned to snow, and the Great Cross Canal lay before him frozen to ice. The esplanade, the star, and the park were covered with soft white, still unbroken, for it was too early as yet for marring footprints. With blood quickening in his veins, and breath smoking in the frosty air, Richelieu hurried into the desolate park, emerging at length on the Avenue de Paris, on the edge of the town of Versailles. The little city was barely awake. The dwelling-streets were still. Nevertheless, two or three men whom Richelieu knew, and who took as much pains as he could have wished to avoid notice, were moving dismally, on foot or in chairs, to their respective rooms. Shutters of shops were being taken down, and a single church clock boomed a quarter to eight when the Duke halted before the house in the Rue d'Anjou.

Richelieu had some difficulty in rousing the *concièrge*. When the door was finally opened to him by a man in a red nightcap, he pulled his own hat so far over his face and his cloak so much about his ears as to be unrecognizable, and hastened up-stairs. At the door of the de Mailly apartment he stopped, hesitating. Was any one up within? He was, perhaps, ruining himself by coming so early; yet it was the only thing to be done. From an inner pocket he pulled the little bronze key to the cabinet in the salon so near at hand. The sight gave him courage, and he tapped at the door. There was a pause. His heart beat furiously now. Presently he tapped again. Thereupon, as much to his surprise as to his relief, the door was thrown open by a tired-looking lackey. Richelieu walked swiftly into the antechamber, passed through it, and paused in the salon, where the servant, astonished and mistrustful, came up with him. Here the Duke removed his hat.

"Your Grace! Pardon!" muttered the man. "Monsieur le Comte is risen," he added. "Shall I announce you?"

"By no means! I have simply come to ask Mme. de Mailly if this—which was found in my salon this morning—could have been dropped by her during supper last evening. It is somewhat valuable, I believe. Will you inquire of her maid?"

Richelieu held out to the man a pearl pin containing stones of some rarity, which, as a matter of fact, belonged to himself. The servant looked at it and slightly shook his head, but, catching a peremptory glance from the Duke, he went off, wondering why such a man as Richelieu had not sent a servant on his errand.

The moment that he was left alone, the man who bore the family name of Louis XIII.'s great minister turned sharply towards the little black cabinet by the wall. With a cold hand, his limbs stiffened, all apprehension stifled by his eagerness, he unlocked the door, thrust his hand inside to that little box that lay just where he had placed it on the night before, extracted therefrom four of the small, round, dry mushrooms, placed them in an inner pocket of his coat, closed the door again, relocked it, put the key on the mantel, in the shadow of a porcelain vase, and was sitting down, tapping the floor impatiently with his foot, when the lackey returned—empty-handed.

"The pin does belong to madame, Monsieur le Duc. Her maid tells me that she wore it for the first time last evening, and will thank you much for returning it."

Richelieu came very near to laughing. Only by making a strong effort did he control his expression. "I am delighted that it was found," he murmured; and thereupon he rapidly departed from that small apartment where, it seemed, dwelt more people than M. and Mme. de Mailly.

After all, du Plessis could not have disposed of his pearls to better advantage. He had not been designed by nature for such a part as he was playing now; and the affair could scarcely have been conducted with less prudence. Provi-

dence—or Satan—had favored him in a most unexpected way; for who was there now to tell of his early and unwonted visit to the de Mailly household? Certainly not the clever person who had made five or ten thousand livres out of it. On his return walk towards the palace, Monsieur le Duc mused appreciatively on the past incident.

“I wonder if it behooves me quietly to signify to Claude that such a man as his first lackey is wasting a valuable life in his present position? No. On the contrary, I will let Claude discover that for himself. When that man is discharged, I should very much like to employ him. Grachet—is getting—a little—old.”

CHAPTER X

“Vol-au-Vent Royal”



WELVE miles from Versailles, or fourteen by the Sceaux road, nearly eight from Paris, situated upon the bank of the Seine, shaded with woods and flanked by a tiny hamlet, stood the most famous retreat of Louis XV., the château or palace called Choisy-le-Roi. As Marly, with its rows of cold salons, its stiff corridors and great suites of rooms, was Louis XIV.'s ideal of a private house, so Choisy, with its tiny apartments, cosy fireplaces, little, circular reception-room, and miniature *salle-à-manger*, with ample kitchen and magnificent appurtenances on the first floor in the rear, was the present Bourbon's great delight. Here for ten years, now, ever since the first months of Louise de Mailly's reign, Louis, in increasing fits of ennui or weariness, and, later still, perhaps, during periods of regret, had been accustomed to seek relief from the formality of his existence in parties taking different degrees of freedom, which, more often than not, rose towards their end to a pitch of positive rowdyism. Only a certain set of the Court was ever asked here; and nothing, perhaps, could more plainly illustrate the difference in the characters of Louis XV. and of his grandfather than the contrast between the list for Marly in the old days and that for Choisy half a century later.

The gayety to be attained by this party of the 7th of December, however, promised to be less notable in several respects than was usually the case. First, the whole thing must take place in the afternoon, since the King was to return to her Majesty's salon at Versailles in the evening.

Secondly, the gentlemen of the company would have been all day in the saddle, and were certain to be weary and inclined to eat, rather than talk. Thirdly, according to general rumors, his Majesty, and, in consequence, the pages of the Court, would be occupied in the kitchen till refreshments were served, thus leaving the lesser lights alone to entertain the women for an hour or more. After the repast it would be necessary to depart speedily for Versailles, in order to be in time to make a toilet for the Queen's salon.

As a matter of fact, this entire affair had been planned with the greatest care by Louis himself, who, with purpose very different from usual in visiting Choisy to-day, had taken care to leave no loophole for impropriety, which, in its wholesale form, was the most distasteful thing that Mme. de Châteauroux ever had to endure.

At eleven o'clock in the morning Mouthier, with his staff and extra train of servants to assist those regularly installed at the château, arrived, and entered immediately upon his duties. In a box which he himself had borne all the way from Versailles on his knee, reposed twelve cases of fresh pastry, with elaborate scroll-work patterns upon their sides and covers. One of these, smaller by half than the rest, was a work of art such as only Mouthier could have contrived. These were the foundations for the dish of the day; and the special case was to be filled with a composition of the King's own, for the delectation of the—so-called—most beautiful, certainly the most far-famed, lady in France.

At something after two o'clock in the afternoon there arrived at the grand entrance of the château a panelled coach, the first of a little procession of vehicles, each bearing a costly burden of petticoated beings, in great pélasses and hoods, with muffs for their hands that were very much larger than any three of their heads put together—and had as much in them, perhaps. By half past two the circular hallway was a fluttering mass of panniers, silks, brocades, and satins; while the adjoining salons echoed to the hum of light conversation and feminine laughter. No *dames*

d'étiquette in this gay company! No sheep of Père Griffet's flock here; and only one among them to whom this was the first of Choisy.

The one was Deborah, who, in direct disobedience to Claude's angry commands, after a sharp quarrel with him, had had her own headstrong way and come hither, to see, forsooth, what it would all be like. As yet she had found nothing, certainly, that could drive from her thoughts the unhappy image of her husband, with the love-light gone out of his eyes; and she was waiting with intense eagerness for the arrival of the hunting-party. The rest of the company being in the same state of anticipation, her restlessness called forth only one whisper from Mme. de Gontaut, to the effect that it was shockingly bad taste to watch openly at the windows for the arrival of his Majesty. The companion lady sniffed slightly, but presently rustled over herself to join the group of dames, who were looking out upon the snowy driveway and the black, bare-branched trees before them. Presently there came from this little company a quick murmur of exclamations, which occasioned an instantaneous general movement towards them.

"I hear no horns. Have they shot nothing to-day?" cried one who could not see.

"My dear, it is not the King. It is a coach."

"Ah!"

"Mon Dieu!"

"What is it? Who is it? Who is so late? Are not all here?"

Deborah had watched the arrival of the coach with some indifference. A liveried footman leaped down from behind and opened the door. Thereupon a woman, hooded and cloaked in scarlet velvet, sable-lined, her huge panniers managed with graceful ease, her great fur muff held high in both hands, stepped forth, alone.

"It is the Duchesse de Châteauroux," said Deborah, in a curiously quiet voice, her words being utterly unheeded in the babel rising round her. *This*, then—was *this* why

Claude had angrily forbidden her to come? Was he riding here simply to meet this woman—for whose sake he had been exiled from France? Naturally she—his wife—the American colonial—was not wanted at the meeting. And thus Deborah leaned back against the wall, having suddenly become very white.

“Look at the de Mailly!” whispered Mme. de Gontaut to Victorine de Coigny. “His Majesty’s arrival will be different now.”

“You belie her. Mme. de Mailly is not in love with the King,” returned the little Maréchale, quietly.

The Gontaut did not reply. She had no more time to waste upon Deborah, who had ceased to be observed in the general tumult. The chorus of exclamations fell now to a series of whispers, for la Châteauroux was in the house. How to receive her? After so many months of utter disgrace was she at once, without protest, to step, with all her old, disdainful insolence, into the second seat at Versailles? Certainly it must have been at royal bidding that she came here. The hopeless daring of the otherwise was not conceivable. Nevertheless, this was a shock difficult to recover from. The whispers, which, during the anticipation, had almost ceased, began to run again round the room.

“The Duchess is long enough in removing her wraps.”

“She is disconcerted to find herself before the King.”

“Nevertheless—soon or late—she must face us.”

“Ah, if we but dared—all of us—to refuse recognition!”

“It is impossible. Besides—the King would banish the whole Court.”

“Here she is.”

At last, amid a perfect stillness, Marie Anne de Mailly-Nesle re-entered that Choisy room which she had seen last nine months before. Then, her exit had been the signal for the cessation of pleasure. Her rule was unthreatened, absolute. Now, as she came in—silence. She passed slowly across the room, glancing now and then, to the right and left, at the frozen groups of women who, a year

ago, would have risked the ruin of their costliest garments for the sake of the first word with her. Yet now, still, silence.

The costume of the Duchess was a marvel to see. But her face received most mental comments: it was so thin, the eyes were so large, the cheeks hotly flushed even through the regulation rouge, the patches emphasizing strongly the marble whiteness of the temples and lower part of her face. An ordeal like this, however, might have turned any woman pale. Deborah realized it, as, dully, she watched Claude's cousin. A kind of pity, mingled with anger at the women about her, came over her own unhappiness. These women—what had they to lose by the arrival of madame? Not a husband's love. Only a possible smile from the master of a miserable, helpless Queen. And so they stood here, like statues, torturing a woman, for the pure malice of it. Faugh! These Court ways were not Deborah's. A moment more and two women, out of the twenty, had started suddenly forward to the Châteauroux. The first was Victorine de Coigny; the second was Deborah Travis of Maryland. As she courtesied to the favorite, and felt one of her hands taken into the cold palm of that golden-haired cousin, a sudden fanfaronade of hunting-horns and a cutting of hoofs through the crisp snow to the road broke the stillness. The great Duchess drew a long sigh. Her ordeal was over. In five minutes a stream of gentlemen was pouring into the room after Louis, their King, who moved straight to the side of his lady, raised her hand to his lips, and then said, in a ringing tone:

"We learn of your recovery from illness with the greatest happiness, madame, and it is our pleasure to welcome you again to our Court, where we trust that you will to-morrow resume your former duties, as usual."

Then his Majesty, dropping the Majesty and his voice together, whispered a few words that brought a smile to the curved lips; after which he stepped back to make way for the press of men and women, who were fairly struggling

with each other for the opportunity of speaking to their dear Duchess.

Louis, on retiring from madame's side, found himself near Deborah. Her piquant face had always pleased him. He bent over her now with a gallant compliment. The girl, quickening with pleasure, dropped a courtesy, murmuring, a little confusedly, “Your Majes—”

“Not Majesty—never Majesty here—dear madame. I am simple Chevalier, to be addressed only by those who love me. Will you now allow me to continue our conversation?” and Louis smiled slyly.

“Yes, Chevalier,” was the demure response. “For it is the duty—the du—” she stopped speaking, suddenly, her eyes fixed on something across the room. Louis, seeing her expression, at once followed the gaze, and himself presently encountered the look of Claude, who, with face set and pale, was staring at them, oblivious of surroundings, time, and place.

The King shrugged. “*Peste!* It is the husband. He is an annoyance—that man! Well, then—I retire, Madame la Comtesse, to prepare refreshments for our company.” Smiling at her astonishment, Louis bowed and left her, making his way to the side of Richelieu, who was talking with Penthievre.

“Come, gentlemen, I retire to the kitchen. See that d’Epernon, de Coigny, de Gèvres, and Sauvré follow us immediately.”

Thereupon the King, obstructed by nothing more serious than the wistful glances of the women, passed over to a small tapestried door, which led out of the salon and through a long passage into the celebrated apartment where Mouthier and a reverend staff awaited him.

“Ah, my good Mouthier! All is ready? *Hein?* Excellent! What menu is there besides our famous pâté? My garments, Clement!”

While the chef, with many bows, recited with great unction the enormous quantity of dishes which were to be served as “light refreshment” for the distinguished

company, a young valet of the King's household approached with a set of white linen garments which the King, his hunting-coat and waistcoat removed, proceeded to don with great satisfaction. The toilet made, and the white cap set over his wig, he turned to the chef:

"And now, Mouthier, for the great dish. How does it go? What do we need for it?"

"Upon this table, Chevalier, are arranged all the ingredients. They are not, however, prepared as yet." Mouthier waved his hand over the special table which was covered with a variety of utensils and the materials necessary for the composition of the *vol-au-vent*. Louis went over and began examining them with interest.

"How long does it take in the cooking, Mouthier?"

"In half an hour the dish might be completed. Here is the case of pastry which was prepared beforehand."

"Yes—certainly. Ah, gentlemen! You are in time!"

The last words were addressed to the six men who now entered the kitchen in a body. They were at once furnished with garments duplicating those of the King, which they proceeded to don with much real or forced merriment. For all the pages, it must be confessed, did not share their sovereign's love for this plebeian art. No one noticed when Richelieu made a deft removal of something unseen from the pocket of his hunting-coat to that of his cooking-jacket; for Louis was fussing over the chicken, and the others still jested with each other, or looked, with some distaste, over the large room, with its rough stone walls and chilly floor, and at the great, open fireplace, with its iron hooks and bars for kettles, its spits for roasts, and iron pots swinging on chains or placed in the ashes, from which already fragrant steam was rising. About this great place, which resembled a volcanic crater tipped to one side, clustered a group of Mouthier's assistants, busied over various dishes under preparation.

"Come, my friends, come! To work! We must not keep the ladies too long waiting; and there is also the

return to Versailles to-night. I am famished now. Mouthier, once again read to us the rules for *vol-au-vent*.”

Mouthier took a slight pause for breath and mental concentration, and then, with joyful obedience, commenced: “Your Majesty will find before him, in proper quantities, which I have myself unerringly measured, the cooked chicken, the uncut sweetbreads and mushrooms, truffles whole, selected cocks’-combs, essence of chicken jellied, wheat flour of the most delicate variety, fresh butter, cream, an onion, a carrot, salt, pepper, mace, ground spice, and a fine lemon. Now in this small kettle the flour and butter must first be warmed together and stirred to a cream; and when it boils we will add one-half the salt, pepper, and jelly of chicken, together with a suspicion of carrot and onion, which must boil in a *tout ensemble* for some moments—”

“Yes, yes, yes! I will do it at once!” cried Louis, seizing the kettle.

Mouthier sprang towards him. “Sire, I beg—I plead—one moment! This must not be begun till the sweetbreads are chopping, the mushrooms and truffles cut in cubes, the lemon grated and its juice pressed out.”

“Certainly. Let us begin! Mouthier, you shall direct us all as we proceed. De Gêvres, you shall prepare the sweetbreads—”

“And I, Chevalier, will cut mushrooms, while d’Epernon, who is on tiptoe with enthusiasm, does the truffles!” suggested Richelieu, smiling.

“Very well—very well! Marshal, you shall slice the carrot. You may imagine that it is an English army. Sauvré—weep over the onion!—ah! That progresses now!”

While he flung these rapid phrases about him, the King, with a by no means unskilful hand, had thrown the flour and butter into his kettle, and hurried to the fire, while an attendant made ready a bed of red embers in a corner, where the hottest flames might be avoided. Here, over the first part of his preparation, squatted the grandson of the Sun King, spoon in hand, stirring vigorously, puffing with

heat, and mightily enjoying himself. No casual observer, looking into the room at this moment, could have distinguished born cook from Marquis, scullion from Duke, chef from King. M. de Gêvres, his delicate brow damp with the sweat of toil, sat gloomily upon a wooden stool, a flat board on his knees, a villanous knife in his hands, hacking vindictively at the helpless sweetbreads. De Coigny, with a light touch, sliced carrots and carried on a laughing conversation with M. de Sauvré, who, with nose tilted in the air, demolished a very large onion with a very bad grace; while d'Epéron, near by, his usual *blasé* manner gone, worked laboriously at the truffles, proving so slow at the business that Penthievre, after watching him for a moment or two, obtained an implement from Mouthier, and went to his assistance. De Richelieu was more exclusive. He, with board, bowl, knife, and four dark mushrooms, had crossed the room and seated himself in a distant corner. Who was to note any change in the appearance of four of his fungi? Who suspicious enough and discourteous enough to question such a man about the contents of his earthen bowl when the King, after much measuring, stirring, boiling, and adding, finally called in excited tones for the mushrooms, truffles, and cocks'-combs, announcing to the anxious de Gêvres that for five minutes still he must work at the sweetbreads?

The three Dukes, each with his tribute, approached the fireplace, where Louis knelt over the savory mixture, which had by now been transferred to a larger kettle.

"The truffles, d'Epéron—slowly—with care— *Voilà!* 'Tis done."

Louis stirred vigorously, and d'Epéron, with a sigh of relief, returned to the table, his task completed.

"The cocks'-combs, Penthievre—so! That is well. That goes charmingly. And now, du Plessis—the mushrooms. They are finely cut?"

"I trust so, Chevalier."

The King glanced into the dish, but the flames which danced before his eyes made it impossible to notice the

slight trembling of Richelieu's hands. Slowly the contents of his bowl streamed into the rich mixture.

“That is all now. Your linen will burn,” observed Louis, as the Duke remained standing before him.

Richelieu started. “Pardon, Sire,” he said, absently, as he moved off towards the table.

“And now the sweetbreads and the chicken!” cried his Majesty.

“The *vol-au-vent* is nearly completed. When shall we announce refreshment?” asked Mouthier, as he bent over and sniffed his invention.

“In fifteen minutes. It is really delightful, Mouthier. Du Plessis, my coat!”

As the Duke helped his sovereign again into the green hunting-coat, he took occasion to whisper, with well-concealed anxiety: “Will your Majesty grant me a favor for the afternoon?”

“What's that?”

“Permit me to sit at table at some distance from—Mme. de Châteauroux.”

The King shot a swift look into his gentleman's eyes, and it seemed as though he would speak. Richelieu knew from the glance that the fatal list had already been seen, though not executed, by the master of Versailles. “Sit where you choose. It will be as usual—*hors d'étiquette*,” he said, at length, with indifference. And then, when the others came up, after recoating themselves, his Majesty led the way back to the salons.

The re-entrance of the royal group apparently made no stir in the drawing-room. No one rose; but a new, more open note crept into the conversation, and there ensued a short, interested silence as the King, speaking on the way to various ladies and gentlemen, made his way slowly to the side of the Châteauroux, seated himself by her, and told her companion, d'Egmont, by a very readable look, to depart—which the Count did. Five minutes later the repast, which could be called neither dinner nor supper, was announced.

In a slow, rustling stream the gayly dressed dames, and the gentlemen in their disordered hunting-suits, poured into the delightful little supper-room, with its panels by Watteau and Lancret, its great crystal chandeliers in which candles already burned, and with its two long tables covered with flowers, silver, glass, and decanters of glowing wine. Places were chosen indiscriminately, for no order of rank was observed. Madame and the King seated themselves on the left side of the first table. Richelieu was at the far end, with Mme. d'Egmont. Deborah and M. d'Aiguillon sat across from the King, not a great distance down from him; and Claude, with a persistent Marquise, managed to face his wife. At the other table Mme. de Coigny was in an awkward situation, with Henri de Mailly-Nesle upon her right hand, and her husband, the Maréchal, on the other side. Messieurs d'Epéron and Penthievre also, to their disgust, had been obliged to retreat to the second table; but de Gêvres, always lazily fortunate, was at the right hand of la Châteauroux, as the King sat at her left.

His Majesty inaugurated the meal and an era with a toast to "Our dear friend, Marie Anne de Châteauroux, and her happy recovery from recent illness."

Every glass was promptly raised and the toast drunk after a murmur of concurrence. Madame smiled slightly, in her peculiar way. She was wondering with what heart certain gentlemen near her would have drunk could they have foreseen the morrow. Her eyes travelled to Richelieu's place. No doubt he still deemed her ignorant of the Metz treachery. He should discover, later, his mistake.

At the conclusion of the toast the room was invaded by six footmen, bearing, on silver platters, the first dish of the afternoon—the long-awaited *vol-au-vent*. Just inside the door, however, they halted in two lines. There followed a pause, an instant of delay, and then Mouthier himself entered from the kitchen, bearing in his hands a round, golden plate, on which, delicately smoking, was the King's pâté.

As it was placed before Mme. de Châteauroux a murmur of polite interest rose from every side.

“This is for me—alone?” inquired the Duchess, smiling languorously at her liege.

“For you alone. I made it myself, Anne. Like it, then, for my sake!”

His words were audible to many around them, and from all sides came little murmurs of applause and praise for such devotion. The favorite’s heart throbbed. Her misery was at an end. The old days had at last returned. The waiting had not been in vain. As a footman from the right presented one of Mouthier’s pâtés to Louis, her Grace slid the pastry cover of her own dish off, and, with a spoon of the same metal as her platter, dipped the hot and creamy filling into her plate. It was not such food as, in her debilitated condition, she should have had. This she was well aware of, and determined that no morsel of any of the other complicated entrées served hereafter should pass her lips. This one thing it was her place to eat. As, for the first time, she raised the fork to her lips, she was conscious of the fire of many eyes. It was wonderful, indeed, that the gaze of Louis de Richelieu did not burn her through all the others, so steadily fixed, so dilating with dire prophecy was it. However, it was the big gray glance of Deborah de Mailly that she caught, as the fork was lowered to the plate again. Deborah was watching, with fascinated curiosity, this woman whom she saw for the second time—this woman for whom Claude had been exiled.

Madame turned to the King. “It is a marvel—the most truly delicious thing that I have ever tasted,” she said. And her remark was not utterly untrue. The dish was good.

“Mouthier shall have fifty louis from the treasury tomorrow,” observed France. “He invented it.”

“I shall eat nothing else this afternoon,” she added. And the King was quite satisfied with his success.

She was true to her word, steadfastly refusing to try

the numberless dishes that followed the first. Richelieu, talking rapidly and brilliantly with Madame d'Egmont, watched the golden spoon return to the plate again and again, till that which he had helped the King to make was gone, and his die and hers were finally cast, though the cups would remain over them still for a little while.

The meal only endured for the space of an hour. Louis had become visibly impatient and restless. His dish once made, served, and praised, he was satisfied with his day, and would have been glad to start at once upon the return to Versailles. Since this could not be, he made the tedium as brief as possible. Certainly the affair was anything but lively. Deborah wondered more and more why Claude had forbidden her coming here. Her first suspicion that it was his plan to meet his cousin had been gradually dispelled. Perceiving the King's intentions, he had had nothing at all to do with her. The matter was puzzling. To be sure, much champagne and *vin d'Ai* were being consumed by every one. The conversation flowed easily on the edge of questionable topics, and the broadness of her neighbor's compliments annoyed her. But Deborah had seen all this, and more, in many other places. In fact, it was the common tone of Court society. The bugaboo of Choisy and its wild carousings was rapidly being driven from her belief.

At a little past five o'clock the King gave the signal for the breaking up of the party, and, after a few moments of lingering in the halls over wraps and hoods, coaches began to drive away from the royal retreat into the dark direction of Versailles. The first vehicle to depart was that of the Duchesse de Châteauroux; and in it, beside her, sat the King. Louis was very happy. Marie Anne de Mailly was more to him, infinitely more, than either of her sisters had been. Her type of character, her quiet hauteur, her indifference to many things usually prized, the few demands that she made upon him, her long periods of silence, the hours when he knew her to be suffering as much from ennui as he was

himself—all of her moods, in fine, were sympathetic to him; and for this he had made her what she was. Both of them were intensely cold-blooded. He knew that he lacked in feeling. He divined her to be like himself. And this fact, which might have repelled many men, pleased him, as he realized that it put him beyond all danger of rivalry, so long as she was sure of an undivided sway over him.

It was a curious drive from Choisy to Versailles. They traversed almost the whole distance in silence. The road was dark, save for what faint light the carriage lamps and the postilion's lantern cast ahead, and the horses plunged rapidly over the frozen road, dragging the heavy coach in and out of deep ruts, and over many stones embedded in the snow. Occasionally Louis spoke in a low voice, and madame made effort to answer him; but the effort was apparent. She felt strongly disinclined towards conversation, though her brain worked feverishly enough. When finally, about seven o'clock, the town of Versailles was gained, and there were but ten minutes left of the drive, Louis broached a necessary subject.

“Your old apartments are ready for you, Anne; and I have also had prepared for you two extra rooms in the little interior courts. In the absence of Elise, our good Hen will be your companion. Your servants are already installed; and I have commanded d'Argenson to meet you at the chapel entrance. We shall not arrive publicly.”

Madame tried to speak, but was obliged to make two or three efforts before the muscles of her throat responded. “D'Argenson—goes to-morrow?” she said, finally, with a dull intonation.

“For your sake—yes. He is hard to spare. I was going to make him Minister of Foreign Affairs.”

Madame saw no necessity for replying to this; but presently she observed, “So her Majesty is not yet informed of my return?”

“She is unaware that her salon to-night is held in your honor. The Court also is ignorant of that. I have planned it so that your appearance may be that of a meteor in the

heavens—the rising of an unlooked-for star, a new planet.”

“You treat her—your wife—very badly, France.”

“*Mordi!* She is only a machine for prayers. She does not think.”

Silence fell on this remark, for the coach was rolling up the approach to the palace. Passing the Court of Ministers, where was the grand entrance, it entered another long, narrow court, a kind of cleft between the main building and the north wing, halting before a little private door leading into the hallway between the vestibule supérieure and the chapel itself. This door was open, and by the light of the lantern hanging from an iron projection above it might have been seen a man in household livery, watching. As the King alighted from the coach the servant called softly, “Monsieur!”

Out of the darkness beyond came a man, who appeared in time to behold la Châteauroux step from the vehicle.

“D’Argenson—conduct madame to her suite.”

“Madame—I have the honor,” muttered young Marc Antoine, faintly.

With a small, cruel smile, visible in the lantern-light, Marie Anne de Mailly extended her hand. D’Argenson, inwardly quivering, lifted it to his lips.

Something more than an hour later Claude and Deborah, in chairs, arrived at the grand entrance of the palace, and went in together. They were a little late for the Queen’s salon, which fact was due to Claude’s fastidiousness. Both he and his wife had made fresh and elaborate toilets, and, as Deborah was very much more rapid in her operations than her lord, she had had nearly half an hour to wait for him at their apartment. Debby Travis never was noted for great patience, save in still-room processes; and though she made no comments, when Claude finally signified his readiness to proceed, it was just as well that a lady’s panniers took up all the room in one chair, so that custom obliged him to be carried in another.

They went up the Staircase of the Ambassadors together, in perfect (apparent) amicability, ascended the left side of the second flight, stopping to speak to two or three more belated couples, hurried through the marble room at the top, and so passed into the Queen's antechamber, in which stood half a dozen gentlemen. From the salon beyond came a subdued murmur of conversation; and Deborah, as soon as a servant had taken her cloak, passed into it. Claude, however, was detained by M. de Pont-de-Vesle, who seized him by the coat-lapel.

“My dear Count—what is the world here for? Why is his Majesty in the next room there? Why do we wait? What is the news?”

“You speak like a catechism, monsieur. How should I know the news?”

“Humph! You are—a de Mailly.”

“Confessed! What does it betoken?” asked Claude, smiling.

“These rumors—that la Châteauroux is on her way back to Versailles—are they true?”

“Am I my cousin's keeper?”

“You *were*.”

“But am not.”

“Then do you know nothing?” persisted the old fellow, disappointedly.

“Nothing, monsieur.”

“*Ah, peste!* I am still in every one's boat. I, also, know nothing. What is one to do?”

“Here is du Plessis. Ask him.”

Richelieu was just entering from the salon. As the light from the candles in the antechamber fell upon his face Claude saw the expression, and wondered a little. It was like that of a harassed animal who has been goaded too far. Going up to de Mailly, he seized him by the arm, and, adroitly avoiding the importunities of the other man, pulled him roughly to one side.

“Claude, where is the Duchess? She is late. The King is becoming irritated at the delay. The Court knows

nothing, and waits to learn. There are all sorts of rumors. Have you seen her?"

"*Mordi!* You hurt my arm! What in the world is the matter? How should I have seen her? Do you think—here she is."

The Duchesse de Châteauroux was at the threshold of the antechamber; stood there, quite still, for a moment, perhaps that those within the room might see her. She was worth looking at, attired as she was in royal purple velvet, her neck and waist girt with diamonds, her cheeks much rouged, but her temples as white as her powdered hair. Her sister, Mme. de Flavacourt, a foil in white, followed at train's-length.

"Ah, Claude!" observed Marie Anne, in a voice hoarser than usual, "I have come to life again, you see!" She smiled, extending her hand. Claude took it, wondering at its burning heat. There was no opportunity for replying to her; for, the instant that she began to move forward, the few who were in the small room pressed towards her, eager for a first word.

"You have returned—returned to us forever?" croaked Pont-de-Vesle, as Richelieu slipped quietly away behind him.

"Yes, yes. I am making my re-entrance before her Majesty now. Al—allow me—to pass!"

Those who saw her suddenly gasp thought it, perhaps, excess of emotion. She made her way through the group in a quick, uncertain, almost tottering way. She gained the threshold of the salon, seeing once more, with failing eyes, that room, as she had dreamed of it so many times. All were before her—Court, Queen, King. Yes. Louis' eyes met hers, and held them for an instant. She must begin the advance now. But—but—this pain—this new, hideous, torturing pain—this burning of her throat—this frightful thirst! She had been uncomfortable for an hour past. This was unendurable. Walking—standing—were impossible. Her clothes pressed her as though they were of iron. The Court stood staring at her hesitation.

One or two men started forward a little as if to go to her. Suddenly from her lips broke a harsh, guttural cry, followed by a fainter one—“*Au secours !*” They saw her try one step. Then, as the sweat of agony broke out, cold and dripping, over her whole body, she sank, in a reckless heap, down upon the polished floor.

CHAPTER XI

“Thy Glory”



DEBORAH lay in bed—thinking. It was two hours now since she and Claude, with the rest of the frightened Court, had received a sharp command from the ushers to depart instantly to their various apartments, in the palace or out of it. That the ushers' voices were the echo of the King's was beyond doubt; and that fact was reason sufficient for the prompt obedience given to the bidding.

Thus Deborah, like every other witness of the evening's sensation, had retired, to lie wide awake, and go, over and over again, through the little chain of incidents which had passed before her eyes. Her meditations were more involuntary, less purposive, than most, however. The sight of a human being in great suffering had roused in her that keen instinct which had lain nearly dormant now for so many months. After the fall, she had been one of the first to reach the side of Claude's cousin. She recalled the press of fluttering women and excited men. The King himself had been obliged to force his way to her. The Queen, supported on either side by Mesdames de Boufflers and de Luynes, remained in her chair, making frightened, unanswered inquiries as to the Duchess' state. And through it all madame had lain prostrate, writhing and shuddering, in her long velvet robes. It was finally Mirepoix, with d'Argenson, white-lipped, Maurepas, very stern and still, and Marshal Coigny, who, at a sign from their sovereign, lifted the woman from the floor and carried her away from the eager, gaping throng to her own

rooms. The King, having despatched two messengers, one for Falconet, the other for Quesnay, and having left the whispered command with the ushers, himself departed after la Châteauroux, taking with him his usual companion in all things, Richelieu. Hereupon followed the dispersal of the Court, and here, later, was where the recollections and meditations of the common courtiers ended, and only a fresh beginning could be made and gone through, for future gossip and reference. It was different with Deborah. Her heated brain had reflected the whole kaleidoscopic picture in a flash, as a single impression, again, and once again. But it was not upon small incidents, the acts or words of others, that her later imagination halted. Instead, she was reviewing, moan by moan, shudder by shudder, wild look and desperate closing of the eyes, the strange illness that had so suddenly seized the woman Claude had loved. That guttural cry, as if the throat had contracted suddenly—the fever-flush, visible to a keen gaze beneath the rouge—the growing dulness of the eyes that contradicted the theory of natural fever—the incessant, useless retching—the paroxysms that had wrung a groan of pity from Louis himself—all these, incomprehensible to those about her, Deborah had noted. And she found two things, two little points, which seemed to convey, as out of some past, a shred of memory, a suggestion that she had been witness of another such struggle—somewhere—at some time. The first fact was that la Châteauroux, as the pain, after a second's cessation, reattacked her with new fury, suddenly threw up her arms and clutched, with stiffening fingers, at the air. Secondly, just after this, a bright sweat broke out upon her forehead, and, as a great drop rolled down her face, Deborah saw the body quiver as if with cold.

Such things—where had she seen them before? Who was it that had passed through her life undergoing such experience? No shadow of grief clung about the memory. No. There had been no death, then. Who had been with her? Carroll! Sambo! The *amanita muscaria* pitted

against the *atropa belladonna*! It had all come back now. She had seen the symptoms of poisoning by the deadly fungus again, here, in this France. She, even here, possessed the means of saving life again, perhaps; if—if—if there was only time!

Simultaneously with that last thought Deborah leaped out of bed, and, holding up her long white gown, ran swiftly through her quiet boudoir and into the salon, which was, as usual, faintly lighted with a night-lantern. Seizing this from the table where it stood, she opened its door, snuffed the candle within to greater brilliancy, and carried it over to the mantel-piece, where she set it down. An instant more and the cabinet was open before her. Inside, in their even rows, stood her bottles of liquids, and near them—near them—the box of *amanita muscaria*. Deborah's eyes fell instantly upon this object. Strangely enough, the thought had not heretofore struck her that *she* possessed some of these things. The blood around her heart suddenly grew cold. Who was it that had seen them not three days ago? Who was it that had stood beside her here, had taken that box down from its place, and asked her about its contents? How much had she told him about them? Had—could he— No! Suspicion was carrying her too far. The thing was preposterous—impossible. Nevertheless, with a hand that shook, and fingers numb with cold, she took down the white box. In it there had been—ten—of the—things. Now—she must look. Could she? Her eyes, that should have sought the box, were raised for a moment. She saw that the room was lighter. Behind her another candle burned. She faced about. Then, seeing some one in the doorway, Deborah's overwrought nerves gave way, she shuddered convulsively, dropped the box and its contents to the floor, put both hands pitifully out towards the figure, and swayed where she stood. Claude sprang forward, and caught her just in time. For a moment or two she leaned heavily upon him. Placing his light upon the mantel near the lantern, and taking her in both arms, he carried her over to a small sofa near the

dark window. There, smoothing the tangled, half-powdered curls back from her face and neck, and taking both the cold hands in his to chafe warmth back to them again, he asked, gently :

“What is it, Deborah? What is the matter? What were you doing here?”

The figure in his arms trembled and stiffened. Deborah sat up, and then rose to her feet. Drawing one hand away from his, she put it over her eyes. “Claude,” she said, in a low voice, “pick up for me those—those things on the floor and put them into the box. Hunt well—don’t let any of them escape you. Then—tell me—how many—there—are.”

Claude wondered, looked at her intently for a moment, and finally obeyed her without a word. He picked up the small black objects that lay about the box, searching the floor carefully to get them all, and counting them as he replaced them, with a kind of interest.

“Look well,” she repeated. “As you believe—in God—do not miss a single one!”

“They are all here.”

“How many?”

“Six.”

Silence followed that word; and Claude, watching his wife, could not see that a muscle in her body moved. Nevertheless, he dared not break the stillness. When she spoke at last, it was in a normal tone.

“Claude, we must go to the palace at once.”

“Child! You are mad! What do you mean?”

“Claude, you must trust me. I know the sickness of your cousin. I can—perhaps—save her life. Come with me now, at once.”

“No.”

“Claude! For the sake of mercy, you *must* come!”

Claude de Mailly sent towards his wife a glance that cut her like a knife. “What do you know?” he asked.

“Everything.”

“Tell me.”

"No; I cannot do that. You must wait. Mme. de Châteauroux has been poisoned. I know how—by whom—but not why. By making me wait, you are killing her. Claude, you love her. I will save her life for you. Do you hear? I will save the woman you love! Come!"

Claude looked about him feverishly. "*I love her!*" he muttered. Then aloud he asked: "Who was it—that tried—to kill her?"

"Claude! Claude! Be still! Come with me!"

Claude de Mailly strode over to his wife's side and grasped one of her wrists so tightly that she bit her lips with pain.

"Answer me. Who was it? What do you know?"

Deborah cast at him a look which had in it a kind of despair, but which held neither fear nor dread. "You will be her murderer if you delay longer. Claude, the coma will come. We shall be helpless then. Let me go—I am going to the palace!"

Claude released her and stepped back. Something in the expression of her clear eyes had brought him boundless relief. There was no guilt in her face, none in her manner.

"Dress yourself. I will go!" he said, sharply; and then, after seeing her fly away towards her room, he retreated to his own, to don heavy cloak, hat, and rapier, for he had not yet undressed for the night. When, after some moments, he returned to the salon, his wife, in her heavy pé-lisse and hood, with muff under her arm, was standing in front of the still open cabinet, looking at the bottles within. At last, from among them, she took one that was half filled with clear liquid. Fixing its cork in tightly, she slipped the flask into her muff, and turned to Claude.

"I am ready now. How long you were!" she said.

They passed together out of their rooms, through the dark passage, and down the stairs. It was scarcely yet midnight. The front doors of the house were still unlocked, and the concierge was just reflecting on bed.

"How shall we go?" whispered Deborah, as they stepped into the frozen night.

"It may be possible to find a coach. Otherwise, we must walk."

They had gone but twenty yards up the street when, luckily enough, an empty vehicle, which had just left a party of roystering nobles at a gambling-house, came rattling towards them. Claude called out to the driver, who stopped on hearing his voice.

"A louis d'or if you get us to the palace in ten minutes," cried young de Mailly.

The coachman opened his eyes. "We shall do it in seven, Monseigneur," he said, eagerly.

Claude opened the door and Deborah sprang in before him. There was a snap of the whip, a plunge of the horses, and for something like the time designated they fairly flew through the darkness, from the Rue Royale to the Avenue de Sceaux, and down St. Miche to the Boulevard de la Reine. When they finally crossed the second Avenue St. Antoine, Claude drew a deep breath.

"We are nearly there," he said.

In another moment they had drawn up before the grand entrance on the Court of Ministers.

If Claude had been wise, he would have entered the palace by the chapel, and so avoided the guards. But this adventure was not of his planning. Deborah's desires he could only conjecture, for she had not spoken during the drive. Therefore, tossing the coachman his golden coin, he helped his wife from the coach, and with her entered the great vestibule, which was filled with Suisses and extra King's guards. These saluted respectfully enough as the couple entered the doorway; but, when Claude proceeded towards the staircase, a musqueteer barred his way.

"Your order, monsieur?" he said, respectfully.

"My order? I have none!"

"It is not permitted to pass without, to-night. His Majesty's commands, monsieur," said the man.

Claude turned to his wife. "You hear?" he said.

For answer, Deborah herself turned towards the soldier. "We may wait here—in the vestibule?" she asked

"Certainly, madame," answered the guard, at once moving out of the way.

Claude and Deborah turned reluctantly and walked towards the other side of the great vestibule. As they went Claude accosted another member of the royal guard. "My good man, I am a cousin of Mme. de Châteauroux. We come on a matter of the greatest importance. Will you not permit us to ascend?"

The man stared at them keenly, with a kind of smile. "Mme. de Châteauroux is not in the palace," said he.

Deborah looked aghast. "Not in the palace!" she murmured.

"Sh! It is the usual method. It means nothing. She is here. Listen, Deborah; I am going to ask Michot, yonder, whom I know very well, if you may retire to the little *chambre-à-manteaux* to wait. From there we can get into a passage which will take us to the little staircase. Remain here for a moment."

Deborah watched him go towards a Suisse, who addressed him by title as he approached. She perceived that he thrust something into the man's hand, and, when he returned to her side, it was with relief in his face. "That was better," he whispered. "Come now—here."

He drew her hurriedly into a narrow room off the vestibule, and from there, three minutes later, through a small, panelled door that led into the south wing of the palace. Here they were safely beyond the provinces of guards; and, after passing through a long series of dimly lighted rooms, they came presently upon a small staircase just off what is now the *Cour de la Surintendance*. Up one flight of these, through two deserted rooms and a short hallway at the end of the King's state apartments, and they halted before a tapestried door.

"This is her antechamber," said Claude.

Deborah put out her hand and pushed it open. They entered. The room was brightly lighted, but empty.

"The boudoir," muttered de Mailly. He hurried across the room to another door, Deborah close at his heels. It

was he who opened this. As they crossed the threshold of the Persian-hung room they faced two people, a man and a woman—Antoinette Crescot and his Grâce de Richelieu.

“Madame!”

Claude had never heard so strange an intonation from his friend’s lips. He saw his wife start nervously and stand perfectly still, while the King’s gentleman took two or three steps backward towards the door which led into the bedroom. Silence followed the exclamation. Antoinette, the maid, astonished at this appearance of the young man whom she had once known so well, together with a companion, a woman, whom she had never seen, dared not, by reason of her place, voice curiosity. She whom Richelieu had addressed simply as madame remained as if petrified, her large grayish eyes burning into Richelieu’s, her face colorless, her expression inscrutable. And the Duke’s eyes shifted—a thing that no one had ever seen before—shifted from Deborah’s feet to her face, from her to Claude, and then stared away at nothing, while his white hands were clenched, and his graceful body stiffened. Finally, after uncomfortable minutes, Claude lifted his hand and pointed.

“Marie Anne is there?” he asked.

Richelieu drew back yet more closely against the door. “No one—is permitted to enter,” he said, in a low, dogged voice.

His tone seemed to break the spell under which Deborah had been standing. “I will enter!” she said, moving swiftly towards him.

Du Plessis did not stir.

“Let me pass,” she whispered.

“By what right, madame? Have you his Majesty’s order?”

“Let me pass!” she repeated, lower than before.

“Why?”

For answer she looked straight into his eyes; but he, though every muscle in his body quivered, steadily held

his own. Then she said, rapidly: "I can save her life if only—there is time."

Thereupon, a little more stubbornly, a little more relentlessly, he shrank against the door.

Deborah drew a sharp breath, and suddenly seized both his large white wrists with her own hands. For an instant, by reason of the suddenness of her move, it seemed as though he must yield. With an effort he regained his equilibrium; and then all the strength which desperation might have put into her could not have moved him one inch.

"Deborah, what are you doing?" came Claude's clear, sharp voice.

"Claude—help me!—I must pass that door. I must—I *will* pass that door! Help me!"

Claude gazed at his wife as though she had gone demented; and Antoinette, also astounded, stepped forward. "Pardon, madame, but his Majesty is in that room, together with the doctors, Mme. de Flavacourt, and Père Ségand. Monsieur le Duc had orders to allow none to pass to-night."

This explanation had apparently no effect upon Mme. de Mailly. For a bare instant she turned to look at the girl, and then shook her head impatiently. "I tell you I can save the life of Mme. de Châteauroux. I am the only person who can do so, for only I—"

Suddenly she stopped. The door opened from the inside. Richelieu straightened himself and stepped forward, as out of the bedroom came a man, tall and stoutish, in square wig and loose black suit which made him appear old. This was Quesnay. Closing the door behind him, he stood looking in some astonishment at the new-comers. Presently recognizing Claude, however, he bowed slightly. Claude returned the salute; and no one stirred as the doctor crossed the room and flung himself upon a chair with the manner of one who has made up his mind on an important point. It was Richelieu, who, after a doubtful glance at Deborah, asked, gently: "She is—worse?"

Quesnay hesitated. Then, with a shrug, he replied, gruffly: “She’s lost. I say so. She’s lost. That fool Falconet—would continue his insane bleedings and cuppings. He no more knows her sickness than I do. Let her rest in peace now, say I—till the end.”

Despite his abrupt phrases, there was a good deal of feeling in Quesnay’s voice; for the Duchess had been his friend. He now turned his back on the little party, and strode over to one of the windows, where he stood looking into the black gulf of the Court of Marble, below. So for many minutes no one within the room spoke; no one moved. The silence was finally broken by the reopening of the bedroom door. This time it was Louis of France who left the bedroom of the dying woman. He entered the boudoir with head bent, brows knitted, one hand nervously brushing his forehead, the other hanging limp at his side; and no one had ever before beheld the expression that now rested upon his face. To Deborah he looked in some way more kingly; to the rest he was more human, older, more cognizant than before of the deep under-life of things and of people. As for him, if he beheld the new-comers in the room, he evinced no surprise at their presence, nor had he taken any notice of the reverent lowering of heads as he came among them.

“Richelieu, go to the little apartments and bring back with you Bachelier, Maurepas, and Marc Antoine d’Argenson. Speak to no others if you can possibly avoid it. If forced, you will say that the Duchess of Châteauroux is not in the palace.”

Richelieu bowed low. Nothing could have expressed his secret terror at leaving that room, which contained Deborah de Mailly and the King, together—with none to prevent her speaking if she would. Nevertheless, he departed on his errand without protest. After the exit Louis seated himself in the chair that Quesnay had left, his head bowed on his hands, his attitude precluding any idea of speech on the part of any one present. Thus the four—Quesnay, Claude, Antoinette Crescot, and Deborah—

stood there for ten long minutes about their master, like him waiting for Richelieu's return.

When the Duke re-entered the apartment, Bachelier was alone with him. Maurepas and d'Argenson, neither of them dressed, were to follow presently. On seeing his valet, the King beckoned the little man to his side, whispered to him inaudibly for several seconds, and then dismissed him on some errand. Just without, in the antechamber, Bachelier encountered the two ministers. There was no speech between them, but looks, in a Court, are capable of astonishing development. When Maurepas and d'Argenson appeared in the Persian boudoir they were prepared for many things. Neither made any sign at sight of Claude and Deborah. The King, bowed and deeply troubled, was before them, in his chair. After the salute there was a short silence, which Louis, with an effort, broke:

"Gentlemen, we shall have need of you—later. Meantime you will remain in this room. While you are here we forbid you in any way to address any of those about you. And upon those who have, we know not how, been admitted here, we also impose silence. Hereafter this night must be by all of you forgotten. Any violation of my command will mean—understand well, messieurs and mesdames—will mean—imprisonment—for life."

With these final words the King, after glancing solemnly around the semicircle of mute figures, rose slowly and moved towards the bedroom door. As he opened it all behind him saw Falconet, the royal physician, turn and face his Majesty, whispering something. Louis started back for a second, and covered his face with his hands. Then, turning about, he raised one hand in a summons that was understood by all those who stood in the adjoining room. The little party moved forward into the sleeping-chamber of her who had ruled Versailles. Maurepas and d'Argenson stood aside for Deborah and her husband to enter; then they followed, with Quesnay close behind. Antoinette Crescot, waiting to be last, saw

Richelieu, whose face had grown ghastly white, falter to the threshold of the door. There he stopped, hesitating, struggling with himself. Finally, with an effort that cost him all that remained of his nerve force, he stepped quickly into the bedroom and halted just inside, his back to the wall. Antoinette, who had sent one glittering look, like a dart, through the man in front of her, followed him into the bedroom, and passed him, as he stopped beside the wall.

Around the great bed of the third of the de Nesle sisters stood those who had just entered into that room, the spell of the hour, the flickering candle-light, and the terrible scene before them weaving a spell of slow fear about them all. The heavy velvet bed-curtains had long ago been pulled down, to give madame air in her agony. Up near the pillows, to the left, her face hidden in her hands, utterly exhausted with the horror of what she had seen, knelt Mme. de Flavacourt. At the other side was Père Ségand, the confessor, who had administered the last sacrament two hours before. Beside him stood Quesnay's superior, M. Falconet. Directly behind was the King, his eyes, like those of the rest, fixed upon the face of the woman he had loved.

Marie Anne de Mailly-Nesle lay rigid on her bed. Her golden hair, shaken free from powder in the last four hours, framed, in shining waves, her face. That face! Dusky, wrinkled, gray; the eyes, half-open, catching the candle-light, and glittering, glassy black, beneath their frozen lids; the shapeless lips, two drawn, gray lines, from beneath the upper of which the white teeth peered forth; was this visage that which once had been the peerless countenance of the most superb woman of her time? And one thing more there was, which seemed a mark put on her by some master will to stamp the life which she had led unmistakably on her in death. Below the left corner of

*Description taken from a medical report of the coma produced by the *amanita muscaria*.

her mouth, unloosened in her life-struggles, was a black patch, cut in the shape of a crescent, named by the Court fop who had originated it, the "coquette."

And so, through these December midnight hours, the little circle remained about that bed, gazing, in tremulous fascination, at what lay before them. Maurepas knew, now, why they had been admitted here. Who, ever after, would voluntarily gossip of such a scene as this? Who would willingly recall it to memory? Prudent-wise with a terrible wisdom was this King of theirs become! Maurepas, standing here, recalled, even as Claude was doing, another death which had taken place in this palace of Versailles: that of little Pauline Félicité de Vintimille, sister of this woman, seventeen years old, a mother, who had also left her bright world behind because of the unhallowed infatuation of the unapproachable man who stood here now—Louis Bourbon, King of France.

Long, endlessly long, was the train of hapless recollections called up by this scene; and when at last a whisper fell upon the silence, its words were an echo of other thoughts. Antoinette Crescot, forgetting everything save the unknowable face of her former mistress, muttered, softly, half to herself, "Is she dead?"

And in the room six, like her, waited for some reply. It came; not from the lips of Quesnay or of Falconet, but as an articulate breath from Deborah de Mailly, "Not yet—not yet—but soon."

Again the silence and the chilling spell, to be broken, this time, by the voice of the little golden clock from the mantel across the room. Two strokes rang out. The winter dawn was yet many hours away. Then, as if she had been waiting for a sound, the corpse-like figure on the bed suddenly, without apparent effort, sat up. The sightless eyes opened and were turned towards him whose scene this was. Louis shuddered under the look. Mme. de Châteauroux stretched out her gray lips in a long, slow smile. Then, in the voice of one speaking from the hereafter, she said, audibly, with uncanny lack of ex-

pression, “Thou—knowest—if—I have—wished—thy—glory.”

It was the end. Père Ségand caught the body as it fell, and laid it gently upon the pillow and sheet. Then, high over her, he raised the crucifix that hung suspended from his waist. Those in the room sank to their knees. Mme. de Flavacourt’s sobs were the only ones heard. Minutes passed, and Deborah felt hot drops from her eyes trickle slowly down her clasped hands and fall to the floor. Then came to her ears the tones of a hard, monotonous voice, in which all tears had long since been petrified to stone.


“Mesdames and messieurs—you have not witnessed the—death—of Mme. de Châteauroux; for Mme. de Châteauroux has not been in Versailles since the month of June. Mme. de Châteauroux died four days ago, on the morning of the 4th of December, in Paris, at her *hôtel* in the Rue du Bac—of—a—malignant—fever.”*

It was the voice of a King; and of such was the glory of Versailles.

*Historians differ as to the date of the death of the Duchess of Châteauroux. It occurred upon either the 4th or the 8th of December, 1744, how or where has never been definitely known.

CHAPTER XII

One More de Mailly?

“ENRI—Henri—why are you questioning me? I know nothing! *Mon Dieu!* I know less than nothing!”

Claude and his cousin sat together in the Marquis' salon in the Hôtel de Mailly. Before them, on a table, were various liqueurs and some untasted cakes. The two young men had returned from a visit to the Ursuline convent in the old city, where lived and repented Henri's sister, Claude's sister-in-law, Louise Julie de Mailly, once queen of the little apartments in Versailles. Four days ago the funeral of la Châteauroux had taken place, with quiet unostentation, in the Rue du Bac, the body being carried to St. Cyr. Henri and Claude were now in black, though their period of mourning, according to Court etiquette, could last but a short time.

The Marquis sipped his cordial tentatively. “Claude,” said he, after the pause which had followed his cousin's foregoing exclamations, “we have not been much together since you came home.”

“No. Of course, it is very different from the old days. One is so much more bound when one is married.”

“I have not found it so,” was the dry response.

“Oh—but you married into a French family of our station. Naturally, Madame la Marquise conformed more easily to our customs than—Deborah.”

“And yet,” said Henri, contemplating a panel, “yet the Countess has not been backward in comprehending the forms. Do you think so?”

Claude's face flushed quickly. "What do you mean?" he asked, playing nervously with his glass.

Henri's eyes fell from the picture and sought his cousin's face. His look was very kindly, but he made no reply to Claude's question.

"What do you mean? Do not hide from me what you know. We have been as brothers always. *Nom de Dieu*, Henri, speak!"

The Marquis perceived Claude's great agitation with some surprise. Emotion from Claude was not usual. "What shall I say?" he asked, quietly.

"The truth about Deborah. What do you hear about Deborah?"

Henri passed a hand over his forehead before he said, slowly and with weariness: "What one hears of—most women."

"Ah!" The exclamation was like a sharp cry. Henri had a glimpse of Claude's face grown very white, and then Claude's head sank forward till it rested on the table, encircled by both arms.

The Marquis sat and looked for a little on the bowed figure. Then he rose gently, moved to his cousin's side, and laid a hand upon the black shoulder. "Forgive me, Claude; forgive me. It was brutal. It is probably untrue. Gossip from the *Œil-de-Bœuf*! Who credits that? Claude—Claude—"

Claude shook his shoulders impatiently. Then he sat up again, ashamed of having betrayed his feelings. The line of his lips grew hard. "No, it is true," he said, harshly. "The King means her for the next; while I—I—the fool—I love! I love! I love!"

"Ah, yes—so do we all. But 'tis not worth what we give for it. I am growing older, Claude. I see many things differently from what I did in youth. I should deeply rejoice at peace, honesty, fidelity, truth; but, since those things are not, and cannot be, I am satisfied with what I have—money, life, clothes, wines, dinners, a good bed, and a man who really knows how to prepare

perfect snuff. I let women alone. I am wiser than you."

Claude looked sharply at his cousin. Certainly, if this were his creed, he was changed. The words and tone, however, served for the moment to still his own growing inquietude. He leaned dully back in his chair. "I should like to go down for a week or two to my estate—to Languedoc—if I dared leave," he observed. "It is an entire year since I was there."

"I went in July. They were doing well with it. Take madame, Claude, and live there for a month or two. It would be an idea."

"In all the cold? With a wolf-pack between us and every neighbor? *Peste!* What are you dreaming of? We should die. No. Some time Henri—some time, soon, now, when Versailles has become unbearable to me, I shall sell my ancestral possessions in *la belle* France, and with the proceeds I will sail away, over seas, to King George's colonies, perhaps; and there take up my abode among the good colonials, in the honorable capacity of tobacco-planter; a king in my own right, my plantation the kingdom, and the serfs all of ebony hue; with an overseer for intimate, and—not a little apartment in all my red brick palace."

Claude spoke half bitterly, half in jest. To his astonishment, Henri answered, seriously: "That would not be an unwise plan. When you wish to carry it out, I—will buy the estate from you."

De Mailly laughed shortly. "Well, I return to Versailles to-night. I must leave you presently."

"I am sorry. I should have liked to keep you here for the night."

"A thousand thanks. It is impossible."

"Before you go, tell me something of the Court. What occurs? How is the King? What is—said of the death?"

De Mailly rose and began to pace the room. He did not speak at once, but, after a thoughtful pause, began, soberly: "I have not been at the palace till yesterday since the night—of her death. Yesterday Deborah and I were

in the Œil-de-Bœuf for fifteen minutes. It was extremely dull. Only such creatures as old Pont-de-Vesle, la Vauguyon, Charost, two or three petty Chevaliers, and some of the Queen's women were there. His Majesty has not appeared, even in the circle of the Queen, of an evening, since. Marie Anne is never spoken of. She is forbidden as a topic. You know—they say—she died here, in Paris. All the journals—d'Argenson's, the Boufflers', Maurepas', de Luynes'—as many as were known—were examined, and the entries changed. I had that from Coigny. The *Nouvelles à la Main* for the week was suppressed. In the next, it is said, there will be an officially 'authentic' account. Berryer or Maurepas, of course, will write it. Richelieu has gone away for a time—on what business no one knows. It is not for the King; for it seems that d'Argenson has written him, at royal command, that his Majesty misses him frightfully. Of course, there are a thousand conjectures, one as absurd as another. I have heard that he was going to marry. Meantime the younger women of the Court are preparing fresh and elaborate costumes. You know what the struggle will be. But—but—"

"Why, then, are you fearing for your little Countess?"

"I—cannot tell. I see her looked at, whispered after, sought by men, shunned by women. Her invitations to suppers, to the Opéra, the Français, are numberless. I, Henri, am not included in them. *Mordi!* I will not think! Next month the King must wake from his lethargy for the marriage of the dauphin."

"Ah, yes! The Infanta will soon be leaving Madrid."

"She is expected to arrive here by the day of the feast of the Conversion of St. Paul."

"The 25th, then."

Claude nodded. "They say Monseigneur is busy learning mottoes for her, and—it is not pretty—practising for the abominable night ceremony with Père Griffet as the bride."

Henri burst into a laugh, in which Claude, after an instant, joined.

"Well, then, I will part from you in laughter, after all. Good-bye—or, *au revoir*, cousin. Come to us when thou canst."

Claude seized cloak and hat, and hurried towards the door. Henri followed him. They clasped hands in silence. Claude sent a deep look into his cousin's eyes. The Marquis smiled, bitterly. "Were I you, Claude, my friend, I should trust the wife. She—has honest eyes."

This same afternoon was spent dully enough by Deborah, who sat for two hours in her salon, drinking tea and being entertained by a somewhat incompatible couple, arrived together by chance, and remaining through perverseness—M. de Bernis and the Duc de Gêvres.

These were exciting days for the fertile-minded abbé. The imminent danger of the reaccession of la Châteauroux had not troubled him, because he had known nothing of it till all was over. Just now his curiosity on that subject was insatiable. But, had it been never so moderate, it must have starved outright in the end, for nothing from any one could he learn. To every question, subtle or frank, the inevitable, instantaneous reply was given: "Madame la Duchesse died in her *hôtel* in Paris of malignant fever, on December 4th—or 8th—whichever day he pleased."

"But—*mordi!*" stammered the bewildered François to old Pont-de-Vesle, "they say that on the 7th she was at Choisy; that the King—"

"*Chut!* Then it must have been on the 8th, dear abbé," was the lean and grinning response. "And let me suggest, monsieur, that you do not discuss the matter with imprudent ones. There have been whispers of Bastille for those who waste too much breath—in speech."

And Pont-de-Vesle, delighted at being able to mystify some one as much as he himself was mystified, leisurely took snuff and turned away.

De Bernis, thus warned, grasped enough of the situation to keep him out of difficulties. Meantime, all doubt about the future of some new favorite being now removed, he em-

ployed himself during the days of the royal retirement in a most thoughtful manner. He visited the Comtesse de Mailly at her own apartment with some frequency. This was in great measure the result of the conversation of the snuff-boxes on the evening of M. Vauvenargues' salon. If Richelieu himself considered Mme. Deborah so eminently qualified for the post, she was certainly a person to be treated with consideration. The abbé might be, with prophetic instinct, rather stubborn in his ideas concerning Mme. d'Etioles, to whom he clung loyally; but he was none the less broad-minded enough to be very thankful for two new strings to his bow.

The old string, the first which he had used at Court, that which had shot his first keen arrow into an inner circle of the great Court target, had become unsafe now, frayed at the ends. He dared use it but little. He felt that it kept him from trying his real strength. He was tired of treating it with care. He meditated on how he should take it off the wood and throw it entirely away. Some day, not far distant, that must be done. Yet, as the cord had served him long and faithfully, and he had once been very proud of it, perhaps some touch of sentiment, rather than a wish of appearing freshly equipped at just the right moment in the contest, prompted him still to hesitate in being rid of it.

Poor little Victorine! These days of hers had become endlessly forlorn. Her face grew pale and pinched. She lost the piquant, fretful prettiness that had been hers a year ago. A year ago she had not yet lived. Now—she had lived too long. After that first meeting with de Bernis in her woman's dress, had followed eight months of fierce, golden happiness, as beautiful to her as they were wrong. Then, with the first, faintest suspicion of weariness on his part, the first breath of fear, of unhappiness, crept over her. Its growth had been gradual. It was none the less sure. From the beginning Mme. de Coigny had been very quiet about her love. Now she was still more quiet in her growing misery. She spoke of it to no one, least of all to the abbé. But he was not so blind as to be unaware that the misery

was there; and the knowledge was not pleasant to him. He was acting according to the strongest quality of his nature—ambition. Nevertheless, there were occasional rebellions from the side of humanity that caused him sleepless nights and wearisome days. At such times he would, perhaps, spend a morning at Victorine's side. But the afternoon was sure to find him, conscience appeased, either on his way to the château of Sénart or to the apartment in the Rue d'Anjou.

The dull December days passed, and Christmas week, with its religious festivities, drew near. The Court roused itself into interest. At last the King must come forth from his retreat, and then— And then? This was the indefinite and suggestive question which most of the young women of the Court were asking themselves, as they devised fresh ways of expending gold—or credit—upon already priceless toilets. In many families it was impossible that madame and monsieur should dress with proper magnificence. Thus, at this period, there sprang to life certain Paris houses, backed with good capital, where single garments or entire costumes of any design, color, or elaboration might be rented for a day or evening, at from five to fifty louis. Each costume was guaranteed unique, and no article was ever worn twice at any time by any one. It was the most madly extravagant period of the most extravagant reign in the history of France. Monseigneur de Chartres appeared one evening in a coat which was valued at thirty thousand livres. He was not particularly marked in it. But, when he was guilty of wearing the thing just as it was a second time, he excited the sneers and the malicious wit of the *Œil* and of every salon in Paris—prince of the blood though he was.

Of all the women who hoped and planned to entrap royalty in royal Versailles, none was supposed to have more justifiable hope of success than Claude's colonial wife, the last eligible de Mailly. She was watched, commented on, envied. Wherever she was seen, a train of followers was to be found. Her style in dress, which still, though none

but Claude knew it, was an adumbration of Maryland fashions, began to be copied. Extremely curly hair, and great neatness as to bodices and petticoats, with a lessening of hoops, became gradually more and more common. Deborah was unaffectedly demure. It had been instilled into her from babyhood as the proper manner for a gentlewoman. The French notion of simplicity, which was no more than a new form of coquetry, became something which was practised everywhere. Despite imitative flattery, however, Deborah was not sought after by many women. She had more than one bitter enemy at Court, had she known or cared for it; and many were the spiteful whispers current about Mme. de Mailly's dull stupidity.

True, Deborah lacked French verve. Nor did she possess French deceitfulness. But, as Louis de Richelieu had disastrously discovered, she was neither heavy nor stupid. During the days that followed the death of Mme. de Châteauroux, while the King lived in retirement, the Countess de Mailly existed dully, as in a dream. It seemed as though the night that followed the return from Choisy had blunted her sensibility. She could not understand her apparent want of feeling; and Claude was no more surprised at her than was she at herself. They had never afterwards discussed the incidents of that night, though both had intended to open the subject—some time. Yet, had Claude questioned her again as to her discovery, and the manner of it, Deborah could not be sure that she would have told him. They seemed now to be growing always further apart. Claude, unhappy and lonely, went his own way. Deborah permitted herself to be tossed, unresistingly, on the waves of circumstances. Only two things she dreaded. One was the sight of that cabinet in the wall, wherein still stood the row of bottles and the white box. The second was the return of Richelieu to Versailles. How would the great Duke meet her, and how was she to treat him upon that inevitable return? A difficult question, this last. And yet Deborah need not have worried upon it, for it was Richelieu himself who would determine the

affair; and, though it seemed impossible that he should ever reap as he had sown, yet the two weeks that he spent away from Versailles were two which, in later years, he never permitted himself to contemplate in memory.

Richelieu, after gaining a surprised and peevish permission from his King, left Versailles at six o'clock on the morning of December 9th. He was perfectly aware of the comment which this conduct would excite; but for once he was beyond the dread of gossip. He could not remain in that palace. His insouciance—his nerve—had left him. He departed in search of it. The impedimenta which accompanied him were not ostentatious. He went post, in a series of coaches, his valet in front, his travelling-coffer behind, he alone in the body. In this way, by dull stages, they reached Chalons-sur-Marne. Here he had intended to remain for a little, when he chanced to remember that Mme. de Châteauroux had written him from here, after her flight from Metz. It seemed that France had been created to remind him of her. He hurried on to Vitry, and there sought rest. Quiet enough were the long, frozen days passed incognito at a village inn. Monsieur le Duc would have fared infinitely better at one of his three châteaux. He could now almost smile at himself for not having gone to them. But when he left Versailles it seemed that he was a man who must hide, and that to go to one of his own estates would have meant to remain there for life—exiled by some sudden order of Louis. Truly, had any one prophesied to him six months before what an absolutely paralyzing shock his nervous system was to undergo, he—well acquainted with that *blasé* structure—would have laughed at it as an impossibility. But this present species of accident—necessary accident—had not been foreseen. He forbade himself now, rigidly, to consider the matter, or to encourage memory in any form. But memory would come back, sometimes, in the form of some one of whom he must beware. Mme. de Mailly—what to do concerning her? She knew—had surmised—everything. But she had no proof. Court gossip was well

checked; for the Duke had stayed long enough at the palace to make sure of that. Mme. de Mailly, were she wise, would, for her own sake, say nothing. Was she wise? If not—he was ruined—unless—he could ruin her. A counter-accusation might certainly be possible, however undesirable it would prove. After carefully balancing the matter for many nights, his Grace decided upon a middle course. If Deborah kept her silence, she might take her course with the King, unhindered—secretly helped, perhaps, by her former champion. Richelieu would advance no other candidate, and the de Mailly might be very sure of the post. Then, when she was installed, would it be so difficult to ingratiate himself once more, he who, out of good-will to her, by her own methods, had forever disembarrassed her of her only rival? Ah, Richelieu was a diplomat—a true French diplomat! But he had studied France only, and was moving along well-known ways. The American colonies were his unknown world.

For three days Vitry was amusingly dull. For three more it was endurable. And for seventy-two hours after that Richelieu and his suffering Grachet remained in their impossible inn. Under a diet of salt meat, hard black bread, a rare egg or two, and milk soup, the Duke's gout-twinges left him, he found himself able to leave off half his usual rouge, and his conscience became stifled under the fiercer pangs of ennui. Then, into this wilderness, there came a letter—from Marc Antoine d'Argenson, in reply to one of Richelieu's.

"Why do you bury yourself, my friend? Surely your mourning cannot be as heartfelt as that of the King. Our poor master wears a look which makes us tremble for his life."*

Then followed entreaties, innumerable and eloquent, to return to the King's side. There were reminders of Christmas fêtes, of the approaching marriage of the Dauphin, and the necessity that Louis make a speedy

reappearance among his gentlemen, or he would die of the vapors on Bachelier's hands.

Richelieu smiled as he read. This was better. Evidently Mme. Deborah had been very wise, indeed. She really deserved what she would attain to. His Grace considered his nervous system for some minutes, pictured to himself certain ordeals through which he must pass, found that his nonchalance had returned, and so summoned his faithful Grachet to pack his things and order out a post-chaise at once. Needless to say, Grachet worked with delight. A court valet suffers as much from court-fever as any noble of them all; and no better proof of Richelieu's position could be put forth than the fact that his servant was content to stay with him through such days as had just passed, for the sake of still being known as "Richelieu's man." However, this very day, the 20th of December, saw the two once more upon their homeward way.

On the afternoon of the 23d the King walked the length of the great gallery with M. de Chartres and the Cardinal de Luynes, permitting himself to be seen by the whole *Œil-de-Bœuf*. That night, for the first time since December 8th, he slept in the small bedroom, removing from the state apartments in which he was always so forlorn. On the following day, to his great delight, Richelieu reappeared, and was the first of the little entries to be admitted between breakfast and mass. The Duke seemed perfectly well, and in better spirits than ever before. Louis brightened under his very glance, and kept him talking for an hour, to the displeasure of the ministers in the antechamber. When Richelieu finally emerged from the cabinet he was seized upon by d'Argenson, and accompanied that gentleman willingly enough into the empty *Salle du Jeu*, where, with a desire for mutual conversation, they sat down opposite each other at one of the square tables.

"Well, then, Monsieur le Duc—"

"Well, then, my dear Comte—"

And thereupon, for some reason, they burst into laughter, When it had subsided d'Argenson's eyes still twinkled. "Well, du Plessis, we are still here."

Richelieu grew a shade more serious. "Let us thank the gods," he said, dryly.

"And—the 'malignant fever.' What do you think of the King?"

"He is pale. He looks ill. We must rouse him, amuse him, get rid of this ennui. In that case he will forget soon enough."

"We intrust the task to you, then. None of us has been successful."

"We shall see. Now, put me in touch with events. What has happened? Who is turned devotee? Who is the last unfaithful? Also, and principally, what is the last development in the contest for the post of King's lady?"

"First, it is said that Mme. de Boufflers and the Vauguyon have quarrelled. When one is in the Queen's circle, the other leaves it. Her Majesty is in great distress. The Cardinal de Tencin has insulted Maréchal Saxe by referring slightly to the Maréchal's mother. Trudaine is d'Hénin's rival in the direction of Mme. de Chambord. And Mme. de Grammont is utterly furious with—the little de Mailly."

"Ah! And why?" asked the Duke, softly.

"Can you ask? Mme. de Mailly is to replace her cousin. Every one says it. The King talks of her, her youth, her *naïveté*, her freshness, continually. You are to be congratulated. She was your choice, was she not, from the first?"

Richelieu made an effort. "Yes—yes—from the first, as you say. What of the other, the bourgeois, Mme. d'Etiolles?"

"Oh—his Majesty sees her sometimes, I think. She is pretty, but—bourgeois, of course. M. de Gêvres is following in your lead. He is to be seen at all times with the Countess."

"And what of Claude? Does he say nothing?"

"Nothing, I believe. The King seems fatal to him."

"Well, let us depart now for the *Œil*. I am anxious to behold all the gossips once again."

The two rose and passed together into the corridor, which opened on the great gallery. "Ah! By-the-way," observed d'Argenson, as they went, "his Majesty has begun to cook again."

"To cook!" Richelieu's heart quivered suddenly. "What—"

"M. de Richelieu! Good-morning—a thousand congratulations on your return to us. You go to the *Œil*? I will return there with you. Charming—charming—the Court has been empty without you. You will reawaken his Majesty. Doubtless Monsieur le Comte has been giving you the details of our deplorably dull state. *Voyons!*"

At any other time de Tessé would have annoyed Richelieu excessively with this shower of familiarity; but at the moment he was grateful for it, since it brought him to himself again. During the walk down the gallery they encountered half a dozen more ladies and gentlemen, all of whom greeted the Duke with effusive warmth, and enabled him to reach a very suitable frame of mind for his appearance in the famous Bull's-Eye, which was presently reached.

The small room was crowded. Every one went there for the hour preceding mass—a service which had lately become highly popular, it being the only place where his Majesty was visible. Richelieu was given but an instant's survey of the throng before a group closed in upon him. But in that instant he had found what he sought—the figure of Deborah, who stood under the Bull's-Eye, de Gèvres on her right hand, Penthièvre on her left, de Sauvré in front, and Claude ten feet away, against the wall, talking abstractedly to d'Argenson's impossible and still unmarried cousin.

It took Richelieu ten minutes to reach the centre of the room, and even such speed necessitated not a few curt replies to questions, and some very brief salutations to several ladies who had hoped for much more. Mme. de Grammont,

receiving from him only a bow, glared angrily; and half a dozen others sniffed with envious significance as de Sauvré made room for his friend before the unconscious Deborah.

"Mme. de Mailly, I have the honor to make you my compliments," came in cool, smooth, smiling tones from this master of situations.

The color fled, to the last drop, behind the rouge on Deborah's face. Her knees shook, and her hands became suddenly cold and moist. The Duke was bowing profoundly—giving her time. When he raised his head again she also had straightened, and her face was well under control.

"I congratulate Versailles upon the return of Monsieur le Duc," she said, after a strong effort.

"Thank you," he replied, and then paused, as if waiting for something further.

To cover the strain of the moment she made herself extend her hand. He took it on the back of his, felt its icy coldness, and muttered "Brava!" to himself while he lifted it to his lips. Then, as he moved closer to her, the other gentlemen, with reluctant politeness, drew to one side.

"You will be visible this afternoon in the Rue d'Anjou?" he asked.

"No, monsieur."

"To-morrow?"

"No."

"I beg, madame, that you will grant me an audience at any time."

"No, monsieur."

"We are friends?" he ventured.

"You need have no fear," was her reply, as she looked him steadily in the face, her poise regained. "In the world—we are friends."

It was the man who was disconcerted. Her presence, her self-possession, amazed him; though no more, indeed, than they did her. Her behavior had been an inspiration. Happily, at this moment, an usher appeared.

"Messieurs and mesdames—his Majesty descends to mass."

There was an instantaneous movement towards the door of the grand gallery. As Claude advanced to his wife's side, Richelieu, with a nod to him, turned from her and sought out de Gêvres, in whose company he entered the chapel.

After mass, at which their Majesties sat together, the Court, much relieved in conscience, scattered for dinner. The de Maillys, having no engagements for the next two hours, returned by coach to their apartment. The drive was accomplished in silence, neither having anything new to say; both, for different reasons, avoiding any remark upon the return of Richelieu, which was the only thing offering field for discussion. On reaching home they retired to their separate rooms to make some slight preparation for the *tête-à-tête* dinner. As usual, Deborah was ready first, and seated herself in the salon to await her husband. Almost immediately upon her entrance her first lackey appeared and advanced hesitatingly into the room, carrying something in his hand. At a little distance from madame he coughed discreetly.

Deborah looked towards him. "What is it, Laroux?"

"Madame"—he came closer—"madame, at noon to-day something was delivered for you."

"For me? What is it? I have lost nothing."

The servant grinned, and held out to her a box—a carved sandal-wood box—on top of which was fastened a half-blown rose.

Deborah took it from him. "What is it? Who brought it here?"

"Madame," whispered the valet, mysteriously, "it was brought by Bachelier, the confidential valet of his Majesty. It is from the King."

"From the King!" cried the Countess de Mailly, open-eyed.

"The King!" echoed a hoarse voice beside her. "The King!" Then, suddenly, the box was furiously struck

out of her hands. The lid fell open. Deborah and Claude, both pale, both trembling, the one with dread, the other with uncontrollable passion, stood facing each other, the box between them, and a shower of chocolate candies rolling upon the polished floor.

CHAPTER XIII

The Hôtel de Ville



FOR the next seven weeks life in the de Mailly *ménage* was anything but agreeable. Monsieur and madame addressed each other, when necessary, in rigidly polite terms. Ordinarily there was silence between them. Claude's jealousy was very real, and, if one judged by Court gossip and the manner of the King, instead of Deborah's acts, it was by no means unfounded. Claude always knew where his wife was and to what solemn functions and small parties she went. If questioned absolutely, he would have admitted that he believed her true—as yet. But he lived upon the extreme edge of a volcanic crater, and the existence was not tranquil. He grew morose, irritable, and habitually silent. Rarely was he to be found in his usual haunts, in his usual company; but remained at home, or in Paris with Henri, when he was not, with all too palpable anxiety, following his wife. His new manner was speedily remarked by the Court.

“De Mailly is showing execrably bad taste,” observed the Marquis de Tessé to the Comte d’Egmont, one evening at Marly.

“Poor fellow! It is a pity he has such good taste in women. He courts his wife like a lover.”

“Bah! He watches her like a duenna. He *courts* something different.”

“And what is that, my dear Marquis?”

“When the King is quite ready—a new exile.”

“Ah!”

But the King was, at any rate, not ready yet. When he came out of his retirement he found many things demanding immediate attention; and the chief of these was something which promised great and brilliant gayety for the Court. It was the approaching marriage of the Dauphin, whose betrothal to the Infanta Maria Theresa Antoinette Raphaëlle, daughter of Philip V. of Spain, had been arranged to obliterate the memory of the insult to the younger sister of the Princess, who, designed for the wife of Louis XV. himself, and brought up in France, had been returned with thanks to Spain, at the instigation of Mme. de Prie, who had fancied herself, for a little while, a successful creator of queens. Preparations for the celebration of the Dauphin's wedding were therefore begun on the most elaborate scale which the King and Richelieu together could devise; and with the beginning of the new year came a series of entertainments given at Versailles, or by great families in Paris *hôtels*, which allowed the Court no time for anything but thoughts of the splendor of existence and the details of new costumes.

It was not till February, however, that the Dauphiness Infanta arrived in France; and on the 20th day of that month the King rode to Etampes to meet her. She and her sixteen-year-old Dauphin were married in the Chapel of Versailles on February 23d, in the presence of their Majesties and as many persons of blue blood as the place would hold.

"My Heaven, but she is homely!" whispered the Maréchale de Mirepoix to Mme. de Boufflers.

"All princesses are, my dear. It is one of their duties to be hideous. The good God could not give them too much. They say she is sympathetic."

"One would need to be with that countenance. Poor Dauphin."

"Oh—he does not know a pretty woman when he sees one, thanks to the good Père Griffet and his mamma."

"And shall you go on Tuesday to the Hôtel de Ville?"

"Certainly. The world will be there. They say that

it will be a finer ball than that in the Galerie des Glaces on Saturday."

"It will be more lively. Some of the bourgeoisie are asked."

"Ah! Then we shall have that Madame—what do you call her?—d'Etiolles there. She is mad over the King, they say."

Mme. de Mirepoix leaned forward over the ribbon and gazed down the aisle to the altar, where the King was standing, close to his son. "I do not wonder at her. His Majesty is the handsomest man in France. See him now—beside Monseigneur! Were I the Dauphine, I should have managed to marry the father instead of the son."

"Yes, truly! She is nearer his Majesty's age!"

The two smiled and crossed themselves. The ceremony was over.

Mme. de Boufflers was right in her conjecture that Mme. d'Etiolles would be at the ball at the Hôtel de Ville. Much to the pretty woman's discomfiture, she and her stout husband had not been bidden to any of the festivities in Versailles, thus proving that one needed sometimes something more than Mme. de Conti to secure a foothold among the *noblesse*. Some half-dozen ancestors had served better. Nevertheless, at this, her first opportunity, Mme. d'Etiolles had determined to accomplish wonders. It was to be a *bal masqué*, and the choice of costume, therefore, was perfectly unrestrained. Madame designed her dress without consulting monsieur. She would go as the huntress Diana, with Grecian drapery of China silk, falling in folds scant enough to show all the pretty, rounded lines of her figure. Over her left shoulder hung a golden quiver, and she would carry the classic bow in her hand. It needed but little imagination to picture all the possibilities for coquetry which these accessories to her toilet would open to her. Lancret himself consented to design her Greek coiffeur, and to designate the exact spot from which her crescent must shine. And

in the end Mme. d'Etioles was able to regard herself with high satisfaction, when she stood before her mirror fully dressed, at nine o'clock on the momentous evening of the last of February.

An hour later the Hôtel de Ville presented a gorgeous spectacle. Its great hall, where the dancing was to take place, was hung from floor to ceiling with priceless tapestries. Above these, as a frieze, were festooned the old battle-flags of France, tattered banners of many a sturdy knight and many a long-past warrior-king. On the west wall, in the place of honor, just above the royal platform, hung the flag and pennants of Louis XV.'s own guard, used in the last campaign. The dais below these formed a centre of interest to the throngs of glittering and perfumed men and women who were by now pouring, in a steady stream, into the room. The platform was raised considerably above the floor, and was mounted by a little flight of six steps that extended across the front of the raised space. This was entirely covered with a carpet of white silk and gold, draped and fastened on the sides with golden rosettes, while over the whole hung a voluminous canopy of purple velvet, in the fashion of Louis XIV.'s time. Below, in the centre of the platform, stood the throne, a great gilt chair, with cushion and footstool of purple, around which were grouped the stars of the evening, twelve of the prettiest women of the bourgeoisie. All of these ladies were in the classic garb which had been wont so to delight the heart of the great Louis; and among them, conspicuous alike for beauty of figure and of dress, was Jeanne Poisson d'Etioles, a little chagrined at the thought that her place proclaimed her class, but pleased with the assurance that the King must perceive her as soon as he entered the room. Like her companions, and, indeed, every one else in the room, she wore a small mask—of stiff, white silk. And with masks, as with everything else, much may be done.

It was understood that the twelve goddesses were to remain on their Olympus until Jove, otherwise his Majesty, made his appearance in the room. But it had oc-

curred to no one that, in all probability, the King's entrance would be unobserved, since he, also, was to be disguised. This, unfortunately, was the case. Louis had no idea of ascending to a purple-and-gold position this evening. Thus the twelve dames posed upon their platform for an hour or more, speaking but seldom, keeping their eyes fastened close on the grand entrance, and longing mightily to join the gay throng about them, where they also might enter into all the little intrigues and mysteries that formed the amusement of such an affair.

Mme. d'Etioules was, whether by nature or cultivation, a remarkably graceful woman. As she moved slowly about the dais, each step was a classic pose, each movement as studied as it seemed careless. From her manner one would have imagined her as tranquilly happy as was the goddess whom she represented. In reality her heart palpitated with anger and mortification. She realized that the King must have arrived long before this. He was somewhere in that company which she looked upon, and from which, by means of this silly display, she was debarred. In gazing leisurely over the crowd, she was able to recognize many of the women and not a few of the men merely by their figures and their manner of walking. There was the Comtesse de Mailly, her all-but-successful rival, fluttering beside a warrior of Clovis' time. Diana shrugged enviously at Deborah's costume. It was made to represent a large white butterfly, or moth, perhaps. The vestment was of white silk crêpe, figured with yellow. On her back were two huge wings of grayish gauze, faintly patterned in yellow, and glittering with silver spangles. Her head was crowned with a silver circlet, from which, in front, sprang two long, quivering "feelers" tipped with tiny diamonds that flashed like fireflies as they swayed up and down. The butterfly was presently approached by a slender figure in star-spangled, black gauze draperies, her head ornamented with a larger crescent than that which Diana wore. Mme. d'Etioules did not recognize this black-masked figure, but it was Victorine de Coigny who had

chosen the sombre, commonplace raiment. Mme. d'Etioles beheld these two women accosted by a monk—Richelieu—who, later, with a humor of his own, exchanged his Capuchin dress for the red-and-black one of a devil. The helmeted warrior had turned to Mme. de Mailly with an evident invitation to dance. Mme. d'Etioles saw them go off together, and then brought her gaze slowly back towards the platform, encountering, as she did so, a pair of blue eyes that were looking earnestly at her from a white mask. Diana smiled graciously. The owner of the blue eyes emerged from the passing throng and advanced to the edge of the dais. He proved to be a tall, slender person, in the garb of a miller. On arriving at the platform he looked up at Diana, and said, pleasantly: "Surely the old Olympus never knew so fair a goddess."

Jeanne Poisson started. She recognized instantly that peculiar and undisguisable voice. Quickly taking command of the situation, she drew from her quiver a golden arrow, and, pointing it at him over her bow, began slowly to descend the steps.

"Beautiful huntress," cried the King, advancing nearer to her, "the arrows you discharge are fatal!"

Mme. d'Etioles returned the little missile to its place. Louis XV. was close beside her. With a quick, catlike movement, she raised one hand to her face. The white mask came off.

"Ah!" murmured his Majesty.

"*Au revoir*, Sire!" cried the audacious huntress.

The mask was slipped into place again. Diana, free at last, slipped into the throng, leaving her handkerchief (a serious bit of anachronism, considering her character) at the feet of the powdery miller.

Louis looked rather quizzically down at the lacy thing. He had hunted and been hunted many times before, but never just in this way. However, he was not a king to-night. Stooping down, he picked the costly offering from the floor and stood for a moment examining it. It bore no mark, but he needed none to assure him of the identity of

its owner. Neither, perhaps, was he unaware of the light in which she regarded him. Ah, well! Generally a king is a king. Sometimes he is a miller. Smiling to himself, Louis tied a loose knot in the handkerchief and then hurried into the crowd in pursuit of the Diana, who had left Olympus for good. He was not obliged to go very far. She stood upon the outer edge of the open floor, watching the dancers. Between him and her was an open space of twenty feet. He raised his hand.

"Take care, your Majesty!" cried a daring voice from one of the sets. It was from the lips of a tall Capuchin monk.

The King flushed. Every eye in the room was upon him now, he felt. The heart of madame beat furiously. Yet—no—the royal arm was not lowered. Louis, with a bow, tossed the handkerchief to her feet. A dozen hands sought to give it to her. Again from the irrepressible dancer came a cry which was echoed in laughter from every part of the throng.

"The handkerchief is thrown!" Which were more truly translated, "The die is cast!"

Nevertheless, the significance of that prophecy even Mme. d'Etioles herself did not realize until, in after-years, she had come to know too well that it had been a warning.

Deborah, meantime, found the evening flying all too rapidly. Masked balls were by no means such hackneyed affairs to her as they appeared to be to most of the Court. That given at Versailles three nights before was the first in which she had participated; and the little mysteries occasioned by unguessed partners during the promenades amused her greatly. To-night she was able to pierce the disguises more easily; and yet, all unknowing, she had danced with Richelieu, who was well pleased with this opportunity of being with her. She, like all the others, recognized the King by his voice. Nevertheless, at the throwing of the handkerchief, she laughed, and cried the catch-word with the others, evincing so little concern at the success of her

rival that de Gêvres' admiration for a self-control that was not hers rose high.

Deborah danced the fourth minuet with a Turk, who persisted in carrying on conversation by signs. When, however, in the midst of the dance, her companion was obliged to laugh at one of her observations, she understood his reason. It was the King again. Evidently Claude had pierced this new disguise when she did. He, in a plain white domino, had followed her all evening, danced in the sets with her, and rendered her as uncomfortable as she was to be made by his surveillance. The King himself noticed, without recognizing, this watcher. After the fourth dance, therefore, he made inquiries of de Gêvres, who happened to be at hand:

"The man in white, who is always near Mme. de Mailly?"

"Who should it be, Sire, but—the husband? I understand that Monsieur le Comte is exceedingly fearful of madame's reputation."

"*Peste!* That man is a nuisance. There will come a time, de Gêvres, when Count Claude will be quite *de trop*."

"Again?" ventured the Duke.

"Again," responded his liege, turning on his heel and walking away.

"Alas! poor Claude!" And de Gêvres stood still for an instant, musing, with a philosophic smile, on the history, past and present, of this house of de Mailly, whose women were all too fair—and too femininely weak.

Deborah was now accosted by a black domino with a silver mask, who had just left the side of Mme. d'Étioles. She granted his request for a dance, and then joined him in the promenade. He proved to be very complaisant and very gallant. Deborah quickly recognized his style of compliment, and the pretty couplets, with their epigrammatic turns, which flowed as easily from his lips as wine would have run into them. It was none other than the man of many strings—the Abbé de Bernis. He was in high spirits with his evening, with Mme. d'Étioles' odd experience, and the quick popularity which it had en-

gendered among a certain set pleased him nearly as much as it did Diana herself.

The abbé had not approached Victorine that evening. He of course recognized her at once, by her thin arms and slight figure; and he was aware that she would know him by the silver mask, which he had worn on a previous occasion. She had even danced in the same sixteen with him while he was with Deborah, a fact which rendered de Bernis not a little uneasy for fear Mme. de Coigny should have seized some opportunity of addressing him with the conventional reproaches. His fears were not realized. Victorine made no attempt to waylay him. He only felt the steady gaze of her big eyes through the mask, and his nonchalance was proof against that. He began to congratulate himself on a possible happy issue from a disagreeable situation. But the good abbé was too quick to hope.

Victorine was in a dull maze of thought. She was living far away, to-night, in a land where it seemed as though she could look back upon herself and her past life. She suffered neither mentally nor physically; and she did not realize how she was pressing towards a great mental climax, presaged by this calm. Nevertheless, in the midst of the commonplace throng, she thought much. While she watched, now from one point, now another, the movements of the black domino, and while she talked with intelligence, even with wit, to a series of partners, she was reviewing, with calm, methodical precision, the history of the single human connection which had brought happiness into her child's life. From its inception to the present moment every scene in the drama which they two, de Bernis and herself, had acted, passed now before her mental eyes. She recalled, with a wondering thrill, the great, perfect happiness of the first months; and she perceived, with slow, sure precision, the later undeniable lessening of her hold upon his affections. The reason for this? That question she had never asked before. Now the answer came at once, quite plainly. It was not jealousy that made reply. No, no. She saw

truly. It was only—ambition. She could not help him higher. She had given all that was hers to give, and more, perhaps. Had he quite ceased to profit by it? Was it quite finished? Victorine caught her breath and looked around her. De Bernis, drawn by accident, was just beside her, still talking to Deborah, towards whom the King was again advancing. At the same moment Victorine beheld a gentleman of Henry IV.'s time approaching her. His walk resembled that of the Marquis de Mailly-Nesle. Divining his purpose, she frowned with displeasure to think that he might keep her from her newly formed project.

"Madame," said Henri, bowing, "may I ask your hand for the next dance?"

"Monsieur," she returned, with a slight courtesy, "I remember that the King of Navarre was wont to enter into mad dances with Night. If you have not M. de Sully to accompany us, I am afraid to venture."

De Bernis, from whom the King had taken Deborah, caught this remark, and, without turning to the speaker, stood still, listening.

"Madame, in my old life Night was never cruel; though I admit that she was never half so fair."

"Ah, you are wrong! The stars are very pale, to-night."

"The moon is over them, and they faint with envy."

Victorine shrugged, rather impatiently.

"Well—your hand, Madame la Maréchale?" repeated the Marquis, gently, abandoning the pleasantries.

"I greatly regret, monsieur, that I am already engaged."

"Indeed! To whom? Shall I seek your recreant knight?"

"He is here," responded Victorine, calmly. "This black domino has my hand."

De Bernis started.

"Then, monsieur, you should claim it at once to avoid further mistake!" observed the Marquis, rather irritably. And, bowing to the lady, he turned upon his heel and walked away.

Mme. de Coigny and the abbé faced each other. Victorine did not speak. De Bernis, after a moment, did so from necessity. "Madame has done me the honor to make me a convenience. Does she wish, in reality, to dance?"

"It has been your custom, François, to dance with me during the evening. Can you not recall the time when you begrudged me a single minuet, a single promenade, with another?"

"One may remember many useless things, madame." If the Fates gave opportunity so soon, de Bernis was not the man to refuse to take it. If he broke with her to-night, the morrow would be free.

"Give me your arm. I wish to walk," she said, in a quiet imperative.

He offered it silently, and they joined the moving procession.

"You are very quiet, madame," he observed presently.

"Let us go, then, to where we may speak freely."

They crossed the room to the now deserted dais, and here, behind the purple folds of the canopy's drapery, they halted and stepped apart. In this recess they were well screened from the throng, which they could see passing, re-passing, mingling, circling in the space before them. And here, safe from curious eyes, Victorine removed the mask from her pallid face, and turned to the man. De Bernis also pulled off his silver disguise, breathing with relief as the air, hot though it was, touched his cheeks.

"And now, François, here, at last, we will talk together, as we should have done many weeks ago."

"What are we to say?" he asked, warily.

"You shall answer my accusation."

"What is that?" There was an expression very like a sneer upon his face.

"That you are tired of me. That you—intend—to desert me."

He smiled slowly. "Desert you? Impossible! You are married."

Her breath was caught by a sob, and her throat contracted spasmodically before she could make reply. "Spiritually, it is the same thing. I have loved—only you."

De Bernis did not speak now. Perhaps he was thinking.

"What have I done to turn you away? I have never wept before you, never complained to you, never showed jealousy of any one connected with you. What have I done?"

"Nothing, Victorine."

"Then why, François?"

Her calmness was disconcerting. He could have endured an outbreak very well, but this was beyond him. He only answered, awkwardly, "I do not know."

"But you *are* tired of me?"

There was a moment's silence. The woman waited. The man, with a physical effort, gathered himself together. At length, stepping a little back from her, and looking, not into her eyes, for that he could not do, but at her low, white forehead that was crowned with the dusky hair and the bright crescent, he spoke: "Victorine—Victorine—you are mistaken in this matter. Well as you believe that you know me, after the long months that you have had in which to study me, you can no more judge me or my motives than you can read the mind of monsieur your husband. You say that you have never shown jealousy to me. You were right not to do that, for there has never been need of it. You are probably the only woman for whom I shall ever care enough to regret having injured. You, I do regret. Believe it. It is true. But, madame, our connection is over. It has been over for me, as you surmise, for some weeks. I love no other woman. But there is something which I do value above all things, yes, above you. I am very frank, because it is necessary. My ambition, my desire for place, is what I live for. There is no room for you in that life of mine. You force me to say it. After to-night, Mme. de Coigny, after to-night, do you understand that I wish to meet you only as an acquaintance, as a woman of the world, of Paris, Versailles,

the salons? I would have you quite understand this, now, since we are speaking together, alone."

Victorine heard him without interruption, her eyes fixed upon his finely featured face. When he ceased to speak, those eyes closed for an instant. She passed her hand across her forehead. Then she said, in a tired voice: "After to-night, François. Yes. I understand."

He watched her refasten her mask. Then she turned to him with a little inclination of the head. "*Au revoir.*"

He started forward. "Let me accompany you."

"Thank you, no. I shall find an escort." And she walked away.

De Bernis stared after her in amazement. How splendidly she had behaved! In what a wretched light she placed him! After all, she was not an ordinary woman. Never before had he witnessed such self-command; never had he hoped to pass through the scene so easily, without a single reproach, without a tear. He could scarcely yet understand.

Leaving the little recess, he stood for a moment or two undecidedly watching the throng before him. The noise of mirth was louder than ever, though the crowd was not so great. De Bernis' head ached with the heat. He would leave the Hôtel de Ville and seek his own rooms for sleep. Making his way slowly to the dressing-rooms, he removed his domino, donned a black cloak and hat, and, leaving the great building, turned his steps wearily towards his apartment in the Rue Bailleuls. Twenty minutes later a slight, black-robed, closely hooded figure also left the Hôtel de Ville, and, as she stepped into the waiting coach, gave an unusual order to the stolid footman:

"To the Rue Bailleuls, the house at the corner of the Rue Jean Tissin."

CHAPTER XIV

Victorine Makes End



THE Abbé de Bernis did not keep a regular body-servant, for the excellent reason that his somewhat slender means did not admit of one. This fact was wont to pique his vanity not a little, and numberless had been his unheard sighs of envy when Monseigneur This and Monsieur That raised their voices in lofty protestation that a perfect valet was worth more than a perfect woman, but that no valet in the kingdom, save Bachelier himself, deserved butter for his bread. There are, however, certain times when solitude is a boon to every one. Such a time to de Bernis were the last hours of this last night of winter, after his return from the brilliant evening at the Hôtel de Ville. He was in a mood that did not admit of company. His swift walk homeward had, in some way, stirred his blood more than all the dancing had done; and when he reached his rooms he found himself in no mood for sleep. Leisurely, then, by the flickering light of the two candles on his table, he removed the black satin suit which he had worn beneath his domino, took the wig from his aching head, put on a somewhat worn dressing-gown, and seated himself before the mirror of his dressing-table.

A very different man was this François de Bernis from what he appeared to be in company. The affectation, the disguise, were dropped. Here, at last, was the actual man, whom only one other besides himself had ever seen: the peculiar head, with its clipped crop of bristling black hair encircling the tonsure; the dark, Southern face, with its straight brows, keen eyes, long nose, and firm, straight,

stubborn mouth, with an anomalous curve of weakness somewhere lurking in it. And his hands, unpowdered and unsoftened now by the falling ruffles of lace, showed for what they were—bony, dark, long-fingered, and cruelly strong. Not so handsome, not so elegant a man, after all, was M. François *en négligé*.

For some time he sat looking at himself, thinking—less of himself, for once, than of the woman who had so easily accepted her dismissal. After all, the want of a scene had hurt his vanity. Could she be as weary of him as he was of her? Was there some other—to her? The night outside grew blacker. It lacked more than an hour to dawn. The candle-flames flickered in the darkness. The hour was dreary enough. It were as well to get to bed. De Bernis rose slowly, intending to finish his laggardly preparations for the night. He had not yet taken a step when there came a light, quivering knock on the door of the outer room, his salon. He stood perfectly still, listening. The knock was not repeated, however, and he decided that it had been a mistake. Ah! What was this? The handle of his bedroom door was being turned; the door was pushed slowly open. There, in the space, stood a slight figure, cloaked, hooded, and masked in black. Two white hands were raised to the stranger's face. The mask dropped to the floor.

"Victorine!" muttered the man.

"That goes without saying."

"*Grand Dieu!* Did you think that I expected you?"

"Why not?" The lips parted slightly, and he caught a gleam of teeth. "You could not have imagined that that—at the ball—was the last?"

"So I did think. Well, what do you come for?"

"Not that tone, please. You have no right to use it—to me."

"What do you come for?"

She made a sound in her throat which he took for a laugh. Afterwards, shivering slightly, she moved nearer to him, and at sight of her face he started back into an attitude of

defence. He would have repeated his question, when suddenly she answered it.

"You gave me to-night. 'After to-night,' you said. Well, it is not morning yet. We shall finish to-night."

"What do you mean?" He stared at her figure, at her working hands, as though he expected to discover weapons about her.

Then her voice and her face both changed from reckless hardness to a kind of pitiful, childlike pleading: "Why, François, are you so unkind? You gave me this time. You must not be cruel yet—till I am ready."

In spite of himself he softened before the helplessness of the little, delicate creature. "What do you want, Victorine?" he asked, gently.

She was silent for some time, till he thought she had not heard him. When he was about to repeat his words, however, she said, with the faintest hesitation: "I want—to pray—here, if you will listen. I can never pray alone, because I need you—I need you when I am before God." She saw him shudder, and went on, imploringly: "Oh, François, let me pray here, once, for the last time! Is it so much to ask? Let me set myself a little more right—before you."

"Will you not be setting yourself more wrong? *Can* you pray?" he asked, sternly, after a troubled pause.

Her answer was to fall upon her knees before a chair near which she had been standing. The seat of this she grasped painfully with both her thin, delicate hands. When she began to speak her voice was so low that the man could barely hear it. Gradually, however, it became more distinct:

"O God! merciful Father! Mary, Mother of Jesus!—our Saviour—Christ—behold, I am come to you! Look down upon me where I am, and, in the name of Justice, no more, judge me! You, who know all things, know also my heart. You know my sin, but you know its reason. Oh, Thou who hast said, in pity, '*Because she has much loved, much shall she be forgiven,*' behold me, pity me, also!

"O God, thou knowest this French Court, thou knowest its life, how they take us, who do not yet know, into the midst of it. We are children at first—so young!—so young! And we cannot foresee the end. We do not know the prices here for—happiness. Is it, then, true that happiness is never to be found on earth? If we find it for a little while, are we not punished enough after to—expiate? Why were we not told all at first? We heard that such a thing as happiness there was. We wanted it—we hoped for it—we thought we found it. But we pay too high. Why do you ask so much for so little? Will you condemn us for our youth, our ignorance? Why must we pay? Why should we pay—with those years and years and endless years of sorrow? If I say that I *will not* pay—what then?

"God, thou art called merciful. Hast thou mercy for me, who have wronged none but myself? Ah, why was I decreed to be born and grow to womanhood? It has been useless. You will see. I—I—will not—I can—" She was beginning to gasp, sobbingly. The abbé, who had heard her in silence, came forward.

"Victorine, rise. This is a useless blasphemy."

"I know. I know. I cannot pray. God—will not—let me!" Her words came convulsively, and she shivered with cold. He picked her up in his arms and carried her over to the largest chair in the room. Here she remained, helpless and passive; and he left her, to return presently with a glass of cordial. In obedience to a look from him she took it, without protest. When he had set aside the empty glass, he turned to her and spoke:

"Madame, it is nearly morning. You must go."

Looking up at him, she smiled—as she had sometimes used to do. "Not yet," she said, with pretty decision.

"Not yet! *Mon Dieu!* what can you do? Why do you stay?"

"Because in my last hours I wish to be with you," she said, softly and lightly, with old-time playful tenderness.

In spite of himself this manner influenced him as no other would have done. He shrugged his shoulders slightly,

and returned, with a gallant air: "Madame, I should wish to assist you with your cloak and mask; but if you have anything to ask of me, first—"

She sprang lightly to her feet, went to him, and placed her hands on his shoulders. He felt the force in her merely by her touch. It seemed as though fire from her fingers were trickling down through his flesh to his heart.

"Yes, you are right; I have something to ask, something to tell. You have heard it before, but this last time you must learn it well, and must remember it. François—I love you. In heaven or in hell, wherever I go, I shall love you. I will not forget—and you shall not. This is the last night here. But—out, somewhere—in the infinite—I wait for you. Now, sit here."

She pushed him, gently, inflexibly, over to the chair whence she had risen. Then she passed to the table, where stood the two candles that lighted the room. Her great gray eyes fastened themselves burningly, steadily, upon those of de Bernis. Under the gaze he sat still, fascinated. "Victorine—you are mad," he murmured once, vaguely.

Hearing the words, she smiled at him, but never moved her eyes. At length, when he had become passively expectant, she lifted her hand. "Remain there—do not move—" she whispered. Then her fingers moved over the candle-flames. They flared and went out. There was a sound of rustling garments, a faintly murmured word from the man, a long breath, and then silence, heavy, absolute, in the thick darkness.

It lasted long. All about that room, for miles in the blackness, the great city lay sleeping through the hour before dawn. The lights of the Hôtel de Ville were out. King and valet alike rested. Mme. d'Etioles and Marie Leczinska had forgotten triumph and trouble. Riche-lieu, devil and monk, lay abed like an honest man. And Deborah de Mailly, under her canopy, dreamed, in the Versailles apartment, of the fresh quiet of her room at Trevor Manor, the golden dawn over the Chesapeake,

and the lapping of the river against the banks that were lined with drooping willows and peach-trees.

The first sound that broke the stillness in the room of the Rue Bailleuls was the same as that on which silence had fallen—the long-drawn sigh of a woman. Then de Bernis whispered, imperatively: “Madame—you must go. Morning dawns.”

A second after came the gentle reply: “Yes, François. Have no fear. I go.”

As the gray dawn came up at last over the eastern horizon, a coach rattled through the city streets upon its way to the Sèvres barrier. Inside, upon the cushions, her reclining figure covered with a heavy velvet robe, her drawn face showing paler than the day in its frame of disordered hair, covered with the black hood, lay Mme. de Coigny. Her eyes wandered aimlessly from one window of the coach to the other. Without thought, without feeling of any kind, she beheld the tall, narrow houses with their wooden galleries and crazy, outer staircases; the shuttered shops, the narrow, lifeless streets. As they neared the barrier they passed the first market carts, laden with butter, milk, eggs, cheese, and meat. There were no green things at this time of year. And yet—it was the first day of March, the first day of spring. The long winter was at an end. Summer would presently be back.

The panelled coach passed out of the city without difficulty, and entered upon the country road. The pale yellow light along the end of the distant horizon grew brighter. Victorine regarded it dully. The coach jolted and jarred over the frozen ruts in the road. Bare-branched trees swayed in the biting morning wind. The inhabitants of the rude houses and taverns along the way still slept. The sweet, frosty air of very early morning came gratefully to the lips of the woman; but, as she breathed it in, she shivered, and drew her coverings a little closer. Presently they drew near to Versailles, and smoke began to rise lazily from the chimneys of the houses and to drift

slowly upward. A few moments more, and the cumbersome vehicle stopped before a house of stone. It was Victorine de Coigny's "home." A footman leaped from the back of the coach to the ground and opened the door for her. With a strong effort she alighted, leaning heavily on the servant's arm.

At her knock the *concierge*, just dressed for the day, bowed her into the house, looking sharply the while at her pinched, expressionless face. She did not see him. Before her were the stairs. By the strength of her will she ascended them, and was presently admitted to the apartment on the first floor. To the slight surprise of the waiting valet, she forbade him to call her maid; and then, without further commands, passed into her own room. Here she flung off her hood and pelisse. Then, with quiet, stealthy steps, she crossed the passage into her husband's room.

Marshal Coigny, weary with the long night at Paris, whence he had returned an hour or two since, conscience-free, careless, from long training, of his wife's whereabouts, lay in a sound sleep, dreaming of her, perhaps. He had not heard her return to the house; and he was perfectly unaware of her quiet entrance into his room.

She passed him without a look, and went straight to the cabinet where he kept papers, orders, medals, trophies of the last campaign, his sword, and his duelling pistols. One of these last, silver-mounted weapons, loaded for possible use, Victorine took, weighing it in her hand a second before she began her retreat. She could not leave the room as she had entered it, without a glance at him whose name she had borne for three years. For an instant she paused beside his bed, looking a little wistfully at the face that was half turned from her.

"Jules," she said, so softly that de Coigny, had he been awake, could not have heard her, "Jules, I have been very wicked, very cruel to you. May God put it into your heart that I tell you so—now. Perhaps, somewhere, some time, you will find a good woman who will love you as I

did — him. When that time comes, Jules, try to think a little kindly of me—sometimes.”

Then, with a faint, tired sigh, she turned from him and went back into her own room.

Three or four minutes later the Marquis de Coigny was roused from his sleep by the sharp crack of a pistol-shot. Opening his eyes dreamily for an instant, he rolled over again, murmuring, “Magnificent—your Majesty!”

Then there came the sounds of a man’s sharp cry and a hurrying of feet in the passage, and the Maréchal started up as a lackey rushed into his room.

“*Nom de Dieu*, Gérome, what—”

“Monsieur — monsieur — madame — madame la Maré-chale—”

“What is it? Speak, fool!”

“It was—madame’s—shot!”

CHAPTER XV

Deborah



FOR three days it was the supreme topic in the Œil-de-Bœuf, and the Maréchal gave another day's interest by himself taking her unconsecrated body back to the château where she had spent sixteen of her nineteen little years, for burial. No one of the Court had caught so much as a glimpse of de Coigny before his departure; but certain valets, news scavengers of Versailles, spent much time with the Maréchal's servants, and learned from them that their master's hair was gray beneath his wig, that he was starving himself, and that none save old Gérôme could make him speak.

"I always said that he had the bad taste to be in love with her," observed de Gèvres, with a superior shrug.

"Will the abbé be called out, or did the affair lie in another direction?"

Again the Duke shrugged. "Really, my friend, I know nothing. The Maréchal has never honored me with domestic confidences."

This, in substance, together with the complete story of her death, and endless conjectures as to its immediate cause, was all that was anywhere repeated, in Bull's-Eye or salon. Naturally enough, then, people began to grow weary of the subject, and at length little Victorine, with her hopeless tragedy, was laid aside, to become one of that company of ghosts who, as memories, haunted the corridors of the great palace, to be recalled occasionally from oblivion upon a dull and rainy day.

And now another topic, one by no means new, but fresh-

ened in interest, was introduced, by hints, to the general room from the King's cabinet, for the entertainment of the scandal-mongers. This was the de Maillys once more. For many weeks, now, his Majesty had purposely suspended the long-awaited choice, and had paid his court with equal gallantry to half a dozen women. After the incident of the "throwing the handkerchief," a topic long since threadbare in the salons, Mme. d'Etioles, bourgeoisie though she was, seemed to stand a fair chance for the post. Thereafter, periodically, she had been rumored as being separated from her husband, of living now at Paris, now at Sénart, again at Versailles—perhaps in the palace itself. Nothing definite was known in the *Œil* or the Queen's circle. D'Argenson looked wise, and Bachelier blinked occasionally, but the matter got no further, and nothing was proclaimed. All this, however, was later, through the last of March and the beginning of April. Some time since, during the first week in March, indeed, the Cabinet du Conseil learned something of royal intentions in another quarter. On a certain Friday some orders were given, a paper made out at Majesty's command by de Berryer, and from Maurepas certain others demanded, the subject of which made even that imperturbable person start with surprise. Such papers were expected to be in readiness by Saturday afternoon.

Upon the momentous Friday young d'Argenson and Phélippeaux de Maurepas encountered each other, by chance, in the *vaisselier*. These two, who were never to be found talking together in the public rooms, were of necessity so intimate in private that the one could fairly read the other's thoughts by the curve of the lips or the shape of the brow. To-day, both minds being on the same subject, both mouths formed into the same peculiar smile of greeting as the two found themselves alone in this inner room. Maurepas was on his way to the grand gallery. D'Argenson, to his great disgust, was at work enumerating candlesticks (the King being prone to periodic spells of household economy). At one end of the table Maure-

pas stopped, looking down in some amusement at his comrade's task.

"You would make a woeful housekeeper, Marc. Now I—have been occupied in a more engrossing way."

"Eh? Oh, something apropos of the little de Mailly."

"Your astuteness is unsurpassed. Can you guess the next thing—the subject of my labors?"

"I thought that I had guessed it," was the reply.

"Oh, no. Mme. de Mailly is their object."

"I am, then, at a loss."

"I have been occupied, my dear Count, in making the estates of Châteauroux, together with the duchy, fall, by a peculiar line of heredity, from the deceased Duchess to her living cousin-german, Mistress Deborah Travis, otherwise the Comtesse de Mailly."

"*Mordi!* You have my compassion. My task is as nothing to yours."

"Oh, you are wrong. The matter is nearly arranged. We shall see, my dear Count—we shall see—"

"When?"

"At no later period than to-morrow evening."

"Ah! Then his Majesty is to escape from the *levée*?"

"Yes, probably. Monseigneur the Dauphin will be asked to take his place after the fourth minuet. And you, Marc—do you know what part in the affair is to fall to you?"

"Alas, yes—I can conjecture it. I had not feared that it would come so soon. The husband—Claude—will be my task."

"I am, indeed, sorry for it. Once before, you remember, he fell to me. *Mon Dieu!* He took it manfully enough then; but this is worse. Unhappily, he is fond of his wife."

"Monsieur le Ministre—you of the school of Montesquieu—have you ever been able to picture to yourself an honest woman—one who would refuse the—post?"

"Never, Monsieur of the Interior. In heaven there may be such. But then, in heaven, I am told, there are no kings."

With which regretfully sincere bit of pessimism de Maurepas passed on, leaving his friend to mingle thoughts of Claude and Deborah and the King's way with bronze pairs and single silvers.

Saturday evening saw the great Gallery of Mirrors filled with its customary brilliant throng. Claude and his wife were present as a matter of course, and were able to dance the second minuet together, since in that their Majesties were companions. Thereafter they were separated, probably for the remainder of the evening. Deborah was surrounded by many would-be partners, for she had long since been able to choose as she liked from the men of the Court. But the one who might command a dance, he whom she expected to be seen with at least once during the evening, did not, apparently, look at her to-night. The Court perceived this as quickly as she did; and, in consequence, certain gentlemen left her side. Richelieu, who dared not approach her, smiled cynically at their want of foresight, and saw, with a nod of approval, that de Gêvres, d'Epéron, de Sauvreté and Penthièvre became more than ever assiduous in their attentions. If Deborah were disappointed, certainly none could have guessed it. Her manner was just as usual—quiet, eminently unaffected, and punctiliously gracious. It was becoming the best manner in the kingdom, de Gêvres observed to his neighbor, d'Epéron, as she entered the King's set with Penthièvre. D'Epéron weakly tapped his snuff-box, but said nothing for a time.

"De Bernis is across the room," he observed, finally.

"Yes, and there will soon be thrushes in the bosquet of the Queen!"

The other smiled and shifted his position. "It is more apropos than you think. Observe—there is de Coigny returned."

"Ah! True! He is accepting snuff from the abbé!"

"We shall not be seconds after all, then. Let us go and speak with Jules."

"I cannot now. I wait here for Mme. de Mailly."

"*Au revoir*, then."

"Au revoir. The Maréchal looks well in black."

Thus the evening wore on in customary fashion, and, as the hour for supper approached, a little quiver of expectation fell upon the hearts of certain people in the great room, who, so far as an outsider could have determined, were in no way connected with each other. D'Argenson had been missing during the early part of the evening, but made his appearance at eleven o'clock. De Berryer and Maurepas, during the ensuing quarter of an hour, each approached and casually addressed him. De Gêvres did not go near him, but received a nod from across the room that seemed to be satisfactory to both. The King himself, during a promenade, paused for an instant on his way to whisper something that his partner herself could not hear, into the ear of Marc Antoine. The answer was simply, "Yes, Sire," but the King moved on with new gayety after hearing it.

Shortly afterwards supper was announced, and the brilliant company leisurely prepared to get them to table. During the recessional from the salon there were likewise three or four incidents, which, put properly together, formed an intricate little drama. Claude, who had just relinquished his last partner, Mme. de Grammont, to her new escort, was looking, somewhat half-heartedly, for an unattended dame, when, to his great satisfaction, Henri appeared beside him and held him back for a moment or two of conversation, it being some days since they had met. For an instant the cousins eyed each other in silence. Then, as they drew aside from the doorway, Claude observed:

"Henri, you are not well."

The Marquis gave a slight, cynical smile. "On the contrary, dear Claude, I have now lost my last excuse for worry, care, or melancholy. What more could the gods devise for me?"

"Ah! I know!" returned the other, very gently, as he laid one hand upon Henri's shoulder. "You must think—only—that she is happier now."

Henri quivered suddenly and shook the hand away.

"Stop, Claude. I—I—no, not even from you," he ejaculated, harshly.

"Forgive me."

"Good-evening, gentlemen."

Henri faced quickly about as Claude bowed to the man who had approached them. It was d'Argenson.

"You look very serious, Monsieur le Comte. What is the matter? Do the powers of Europe threaten the last treaty, or is one of the King's lapdogs dead?" inquired Claude, with his most catching smile, and anxious to give Henri a moment to change his thought.

D'Argenson's expression did not brighten. Rather, it grew still more gloomy. It seemed difficult for him to answer the laughing question. At this moment, in fact, he would have preferred being in the thick of Dettingen to standing here, where he was about to inflict a merciless blow on a defenceless head. "Monsieur le Comte," he began, looking steadily at Claude, "I wish you to believe me when I say that never before, in all my life, have I so regretted my duty. In speaking to you I am obeying an absolute command. Monsieur—my friend—Claude—I have been this evening to the Rue d'Anjou. I left there—a letter—from the King—which you—"

He stopped. Maurepas had told him that this man would behave well. It was not so. Claude had turned deathly white. Both hands had flown to his head, and he reeled where he stood. Henri sprang forward and caught him about the body.

"Let me alone," muttered Claude, thickly. "I sha'n't fall."

"I will bring some wine," said d'Argenson, gently.

"No. I will have nothing." For a moment the three stood motionless and silent. Then Claude opened his eyes and looked upon the King's minister. "The letter—invites me—to travel?"

D'Argenson bowed.

Claude slowly drew a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his lips with it. "May God damn to hell the King

of France! All the armies in his kingdom shall not drive me from it till I've got back my wife!"

"Claude! Claude! Come away!" said Henri, sharply.

"No. Not till I have Deborah to go with me."

"Monsieur—monsieur, that is not possible," whispered d'Argenson, anxiously. "Mme. de Mailly will be granted her choice. She will not be in any way forced. His Majesty will merely offer."

After he had spoken these words d'Argenson was not sure that Claude had heard them. The young man stood for a minute or two staring at him stupidly, with a look of heavy indifference. Then his body began to straighten, he breathed sharply two or three times, and d'Argenson's muscles stiffened as he prepared to avoid an attack. Claude's hand opened and shut convulsively, but he made no move forward. After a long time, when the tension had grown almost past bearing to his cousin and the minister, de Mailly, with a dignity that Louis himself could not have equalled, said, measuredly: "Well, messieurs, I go home to await my wife. If her choice is free, if she is not forced, she will return to me. This is inevitable. Henri, let us go."

The Marquis, with a melancholy glance at d'Argenson's astonished face, grasped his cousin's arm. Before they went away, however, Claude turned once more to the Count.

"Monsieur, if Mme. de Mailly *does* remain, all the bolts, all the bars and walls of the Bastille will not be enough to save Louis of France from death at my hands. Tell him so."

D'Argenson bowed low, and Claude, stumbling in his walk like a drunken man, left the room on Henri's arm.

In the mean time Deborah had not reached the supper-room. De Gêvres was her escort from the Hall of Mirrors, supposedly to the Salle du Grand Couvert; but, when they stood upon the threshold of the first corridor, he bent over her, saying, in a low voice: "Madame, the public room will be crowded and disagreeable. In the Salle des Pen-

dules there is to be a little supper, to which I am instructed to invite you. Will you do me the honor to accompany me?"

And Deborah, to whom these private parties so frequently arranged for six or eight in some courtier's suite were far preferable to the general feast, accepted the invitation with cordial good-will. Thereupon they turned from the procession and passed through various courts, halls, and antechambers till they reached the Grande Galerie. Down the still, empty length of this, into the long corridor opening out of it at the other end, and finally into the passage of the Salle du Jeu, they walked.

"It must be a small party, or are we the first?" asked Deborah, as they entered the room and paused before a closed door.

De Gêvres did not answer. Instead, he knocked twice upon the panel.

"Enter," came a voice from within.

The Duke pulled open the door, and Deborah passed before him. The door closed again, softly, behind her. She was alone with the King.

"Sire!" she cried, with a little gasp.

Louis, who stood at the end of the room, his back to the fire, smiled at her. "Oh, there are no terms of etiquette to-night. We are only very good friends, you and I, my dear little Countess. Do you see? Now let us sit down together at this little table, where Mouthier has prepared a most delicate repast; and as we eat and quaff together some of the golden wine of Champagne, we will talk. Will you not thus honor me, madame?"

Deborah, who had grown very white during the King's speech, looked anxiously about her.

"We are utterly alone. None can hear us," observed his Majesty again, with the idea of being reassuring. He did his companion unguessed injustice. She had been thrown into a sudden panic of fear.

"Pardon, your Majesty, I—I do not desire to eat. I am not hungry. When M. de Gêvres conducted me here, I did

not understand what he meant. If you will grant me permission, I will go."

This speech pleased the King incredibly. Here at last was a woman who would not fall at his feet, whom it were worth his while to win. Her fear was certainly genuine. She was actually moving towards the door. He did not stir from his place, wishing not to alarm her further.

"My dear Mme. de Mailly, how cruel to leave me quite alone! As your sovereign, I might command. As a man, however, I only entreat. Try, for me, one of these rissoles, which I myself assisted in making. Ah! That is better."

Deborah, something reassured by the quiet tone and the apparent liberty which was hers, looked doubtfully over to the little table whose glass and gold shone brightly under the great chandelier. The King was holding a chair for her. Flight now, were there really nothing intended by this gallantry, might be a little awkward to explain next day. After a moment's thought, Deborah went slowly over and sat down at the table. Louis, with a sigh of comfort and relief, placed himself beside her; and, taking her plate, filled it with portions from a number of dishes. The girl looked down at them with a troubled expression. She was thinking of Choisy

"Madame—pledge me in this," murmured the King, filling her broad-bowled glass with the sparkling wine which she did not very much like. Wetting her lips with it, however, she said, demurely: "To your Majesty."

"Oh—that is a cold toast indeed. See, I will do better." He lifted his glass. "I drink to Deborah de Mailly, lady of the palace of the Queen, and beloved comrade of his Gracious Majesty the Fifteenth Louis of France. Eh, little one, is it not better?"

"Lady of the palace of the Queen," repeated Deborah, slowly, her large eyes fixed upon the King's face.

"Yes, I have said it. Your appointment is here," he replied, tapping the breast of his coat. "Now tell me what else there is in the world that you wish for. Ah—

there is something, I know. Estates—money—servants—what will you have, my little one?"

Deborah shivered with cold. She realized the situation now, and the nerves beneath her flesh were quivering. Pulling herself together with a strong mental effort, she sat up, rigid and stiff, before her untouched food. Her mind was quite clear, her path well defined.

"What is it that you want? I read desire in your eyes," repeated the King, thinking to win his suit more easily than he had at first believed.

"No, no. There is nothing. I—thank your Majesty for your kindness. There is nothing that I want. Indeed, indeed, there is nothing."

"Happiest of humankind! To want nothing! Yet there is something that I desire. I, King of France, am not like you. Can you guess, Deborah, what it is that I long for more than I wanted my crown?"

"Another rissole, Sire, I think."

He was put out, and yet there was a little twinkle in her eyes that became her wonderfully, and seemed, too, to give him hope. After an instant he felt that anger was unnecessary, and thus recovered his ardent dignity as best he could. "I beg of you—be serious. Since you will name for me nothing that you wish, I will at least tell you in what you are lacking. When you hear these things—desire will be born. Madame—read this."

From his coat Louis took a broad paper, folded and royally sealed. Deborah, her face troubled and her hands shaking slightly, rose to receive it, and, after a moment of hesitation, at a most impatient nod from the King, broke the seals, and found the inside of the document covered with the neat, legible writing of Maurepas. She glanced quickly over its lines:

"The right to confer titles of honor being one of the most sublime attributes of supreme power, the Kings, our predecessors, have left us divers monuments of the use they have made of it in favor of persons whose virtues and merits they desired to extol and make illustrious. Considering

that our very dear and well-beloved cousin, Deborah Travis, wife of the Comte de Mailly, issues from one of the greatest families of a nation closely allied to us, whom we delight to honor; that she is attached as lady of the palace to the Queen, our very dear companion; that she is united by marriage to one of the most ancient and illustrious families in our realm, whose ancestors have, for several centuries, rendered important services to our crown; and that she joins to all these advantages those virtues and qualities of heart and mind which have gained for her a just and universal consideration, we take the highest satisfaction in proclaiming her succession to the title and estate of that esteemed and honored lady, her cousin, Marie Anne de Mailly, and we hereby invest her with the Duchy of Châteauroux, together with all its appurtenances and dependencies, situated in Berry.”*

Deborah, having finished the perusal of this document, let it float from her fingers to the floor, while she stood perfectly still, staring at the face of the man seated before her. Her expression, first of amazement, then of horror, was changing now to something puzzled and undecided, which the King beheld with relief.

“Madame,” he observed, “you should thank me. I make you first lady of the Court. I give you title, wealth, power. I place a Queen below you in my own esteem. I give you ministers to command, no one to obey. I make your antechamber a room more frequented than my own cabinet. I leave it for you, if you wish it, to rule France. And what is it that I ask in return? Nothing! Nothing that your own generosity will not grant without the asking. Think of what you are, and of what you will become. Have you, then, no word in which to thank me?”

He also had risen now, and was looking at her, as she stood, with a mixture of curiosity, admiration, and impatience.

*This form is taken from the letters-patent used in the case of Marie Anne de Mailly.

Deborah was still—so still that she might have been taken for a man-made thing. And by the expression of her face Louis knew that he must not speak more now. She was fighting her battle; his forces must win or lose as they stood, augmented no further. Before her had risen the picture of two lives, the one that was opening to her and the one that she had thought to live. As she thought, the real life, for a little, grew dim, distant, unimportant. The other, with its scarce imaginable power, glory, position, became clearer and still more clear till she could see into its inmost depths. Adulation, pleasure, riches, ease, universal sway, a court at her feet, a King to bar malice from her door, an existence of beauty, culture, laughter, light, founded on—what? ending—how? Yes, these questions came, inevitably. To answer the first, she looked slowly over the man before her, as he stood in all the beauty of his young manhood and majesty. Nevertheless, through that beauty his true nature was readable, showing plainly through his eyes, in the expression of his heavy lower lip, in his too weak chin—that sullen, morose, pettish, carnal, warped nature, best fitted for the peasant's hut, destined by Fate, lover of grim comedy, for the greatest palace of earth. This man, who had no place in her soul-life, must build her pedestal, must place her thereon. And the end of all—when end should come—ah! Now Deborah saw again the bed of Marie Anne de Châteauroux, with the Duchess upon it, as she had lain there for the last time. And Marie Anne de Mailly had been Claude's cousin—Claude's—

"Mme. de Châteauroux, will you examine to-night your apartments in the little courts? Will you take possession at—"

"Oh!—O God!—Help me!"

"What are you saying!" uttered the King, sharply.

Then she turned upon him with that which for the moment she had let lie dormant in her heart, now all awake and quivering with life—her love for Claude. It was, perhaps, God, who was helping as she asked.



"'I AM NOT THE DUCHESS OF CHÂTEAUFROUX'"

"I am saying that I refuse to listen any more to your insults. I am saying that I am ashamed—utterly ashamed—that you should so have thought of me that you dare offer them. I am *not* Duchess of Châteauroux!" She placed her foot on the fallen paper, and stammered over the French words as she spoke, for she was thinking in English now. "God save me from it! I am no lady of the palace of the Queen—I am not of Versailles, nor of France. I owe allegiance to no French King. I come from a country that is true and sweet and pure, where they hate and despise your French ways, your unholy customs, your laws, your manners, your dishonoring of honest things, your treatment of women. I am honest. I hate myself for having lived among you for months as I have done. I am going away, I will leave here, this place, to-night. If my—my husband will not take me—I shall go back alone, by the way I came, to my country, where the men, if they are awkward, are upright, if the women have not etiquette, they are pure.—Let me go!—Let me go!"

Louis, in a sudden access of fury, had sprung forward and seized her by the wrists. Deborah's temper was fully roused at last; her blood poured hotly through her veins. Her life had become a little thing in comparison to the laws for which she was speaking, the sense of right which seemed to hold no part in this French order of things. Bracing herself as she might in her high-heeled slippers, she suddenly threw all her weight forward against the man, taking him off his guard, and so forcing him back that he was obliged to loosen his hold of her in order to regain equilibrium. The instant that she was free Deborah turned and fled to the door. She flung herself bodily against it. It was locked from the outside.

"Good Heaven!" muttered the girl, in English.

"What is it you say, dear madame?" inquired the King, smiling in amused triumph as she turned to him, still grasping the handle of the door.

"You are unfair! This is unlawful! I am not to blame!" she said, her voice quivering.

"Madame—my dear Deborah—who could be unfair with you?" He came towards her, looking not too well pleased that she shrank back as far as possible at his approach. When she was close against the immovable door, and he just before her, he stopped, looked at her for a long moment with a peculiar, half-patronizing smile, then suddenly fell upon his knee at her feet, and captured one of her unwilling hands.

"Deborah—my Deborah—*quel drôle de nom!*—let us now forget locked doors, let us forget Majesties and riches and favors, and let us think only that here am I, Louis, thus before you, declaring my love. Let us make as though we were two peasants. I swear to you that to me you are all in all. Without you I cannot live. All the days of my life I will work for you, will cherish you. Now tell me if you will not accept such love?"

Deborah looked into the uplifted face of the King. Certainly it was marvellously handsome—beautiful enough to have turned the heads of many women. Perhaps, after all, there was excuse for those poor creatures, the three sisters, who had yielded to him. Perhaps, after all, pity was their only just measure. But she—Deborah Travis—had known handsome faces before. Indeed, she had come near to life-long unhappiness through that which she had known best. Suddenly, as in a picture, she beheld there, beside the King, the head of Charles Fairfield. Yes, Louis was the finer-featured of the two. Nevertheless, all temptation was gone.

"Monsieur le Roi," she said, clearly, and with a kind of cynicism even through her nervousness, "you are too late. I have been courted before, and I've plighted my troth and given my heart into some one's keeping. You are too late."

"*Diable! Dix milles diables!*" cried his Majesty, scrambling awkwardly to his feet and backing away from her. "Do you know who I am?—what I can do, madame? Do you know that, with one word, I can exile you? Bah! Who—who—is the man you prefer to me?"

"My husband," was the demure reply.

"Oh! It is an insult! Already your husband has his

commands. He leaves Versailles to-night, forever. Do not be afraid."

"*Leaves to-night!*" A dark flush spread over Deborah's face. "Leaves to-night! *Mon Dieu!* When—where—how? Oh, I will go now! You shall let me go to him, do you hear? At once! Why, I shall be left here alone! I—I—shall be like Mme. de Coigny. Your Majesty—" suddenly she grew calm, and her voice gently sweet—"Your Majesty, let me go."

"As you have seen, the door is locked."

"Open it, then, or—there is another!" she pointed across the room to the door in the opposite wall which led into the royal suite.

The King moved about quickly, placing himself in front of it. The act was sufficient. It showed Deborah that she had neither pity nor mercy to hope for, nothing but her own determination on which to depend. And, as the knowledge of helplessness became more certain, so did her will become stronger, her brain more alert. She looked about the room. Was there a weapon of defence or of attack anywhere within reach? On the supper-table were knives and forks of gold—dull, useless things. On one side of the room was a great clock; on the mantel stood another. There were also stiff chairs, tabourets, an *escritoire*, and the table—these were all. What to do? She must get home, get to Claude, as rapidly as possible. Would he be there? Would he have trusted and waited for her? If not—what? She would not think of that now. She must first escape through that unlocked door guarded by the King. How to do it? Strategy, perhaps.

"Well, madame, have you decided?" inquired the King, coolly.

Deborah gave a slight, pretty smile. "I have only decided that I should like to finish Mouthier's comfits. We have not even touched the cream," she said, coquettishly.

Louis laughed. "Ah! That is well, that! Let us sit down."

Pardonable vanity, considering his experiences hereto-

fore, had thrown him easily off his guard. So the two seated themselves again at the little table. Deborah, for an added bit of flattery, as he thought, taking the chair which he had used before, and which was nearest the door of escape. The King helped her bountifully to the smooth cream, which she began upon with apparent avidity.

"Louis," she said, suddenly, looking at him with a significant smile and eyes half closed, "pick up for me the paper that I dropped upon the floor. I—have not finished reading it."

The King was enchanted. She was surrendering at last. If she chose to make it easier for her vanity by treating him like a servant—why, he was willing. He rose at once and went back to the spot where Maurepas' document had fallen and been spurned by Deborah's heel. He stooped to pick it up. There was a crisp rustle of stiff, silk petticoats. He looked up just in time to behold his prize fling open the north door and hurry through it into the room beyond. This was the King's bedroom, and in it, at this hour, were only Bachelier, Levet, and two underfootmen. These four, in open-mouthed amazement, beheld the flying figure of a lady burst in from the Salle des Pendules, run across the royal room, and escape into the council-chamber, just as the King, purple with anger, shouted from the doorway: "Beasts! Fools! Idiots! Could you not hold her?"

Bachelier started up. "Shall I follow, your Majesty?"

"No, *imbecile!* Should the King's valet be seen chasing a woman through the corridors of Versailles at midnight? Ah! It is abominable!"

Thereupon his gracious Majesty threw himself into an arm-chair with an expression on his royal countenance which plainly told his valet that it would be many days ere an unnecessary word again passed the master's lips.

Once more, as a year ago, Henri de Mailly-Nesle sat in Claude's bedroom, on the eve of that young man's departure from Versailles. But the situation was differ-

ent enough this time. Now it was Henri who, with a strong effort, sat trying to calm the feverish excitement and anxiety of the other. Upon the floor an open coffer stood ready; but nothing had yet been put into it. Claude would not admit a servant to the room. He was pacing rapidly up and down, up and down the apartment, talking sometimes wildly to Henri, sometimes silent, sometimes muttering incoherently to himself. His dress was disordered, his wig awry; one slipper and his sword had been tossed together into a corner. He was for the time bereft of reason. It was now half an hour since the return from the palace. D'Argenson's letter had been found awaiting them, but Claude had not read it. What need was there to do so?

"Henri, two hundred thousand is too much for the estate. The château is impossible—you are giving me money. I'll not have it—"

"*Chut*, child! Do you think—"

"Ah! She has not come—she does not come—she does not come! I shall go mad. I shall shoot myself if she does not return! *Mon Dieu!*—*Mon Dieu!*"

"Claude, be calm. There is time. She could not yet have got away. Be calm. She will come, of course."

Henri spoke soothingly, but, as the minutes passed, and still Deborah delayed, his heart sank. What to do with his cousin? Claude would, in a little time, be actually unbalanced, he feared.

"Henri, the château might be repaired. I should like to live in it again. I should like to be buried there. Ah, if she is not here in ten minutes, I shall use my pistol. Then I will be buried there, in the vault, beside Alexandre. Poor Alexandre! You remember—he never knew her. He knew what it meant to lose his—Deborah!—Deborah!—Deborah! *Mon Dieu*, Henri, I have been brutal to her. She will not come back. The time is come—the time is come—I will put an end to myself!"

Claude made a quick dash for the table, on which, amid a pile of varied articles, were his duelling pistols. He

picked one of them up. Henri sprang from his place and seized his cousin round the shoulders.

"Idiot!—Put it down!—Stop!"

Claude was struggling to free himself from the grasp. The strength of a madman seemed to be in his arms. Henri felt his hold weakening. He was being repulsed.

"Armand!" shouted the Marquis hoarsely. "*Armand! À moi! Au secours! Monsieur le Comte—*"

"*Mordi!* you shall not!" growled Claude, furiously. "I tell you she is not coming! I will kill myself! Let me—let me go!"

With a mighty wrench Claude pulled himself free, overbalancing his cousin, who fell heavily to the floor. Claude had the pistol in his hand. The valet had not appeared. For just the shade of an instant de Mailly hesitated.

"Claude!" came a tremulous, quivering voice from the doorway.

The weapon clattered to the floor. Claude held out both arms, and Deborah, dazed, weary, utterly happy, went into them and was clasped close to his heart.

"Claude—we must go away," she whispered, her lips close to his ear.

"We will go."

"Where—where—Claude?"

"I have no longer a country, my wife. But I know that which is there for us over the sea—that wherein I found you first."

Deborah gave a little sob of relief; and, as her lips met those of her husband, Henri de Mailly, who had kept him for her, sharply turned away.

EPILOGUE

A Trail on the Water



AND thus at last we come down to the sea—black, murmurous waste—rolling vastly under the evening sky, and against the far golden horizon. In this swift approaching night all that has been, all the base dishonesty, the foulness, the little-visible much-felt, shall be washed away, for it is the world that was. When the dripping sun flashes up again out of the east, 'twill be to send a shower of golden beams down the wind that is bearing a white-winged bark westward over the blue expanse. What two souls this vessel bears, whence—from what darkness of the Old—whither—to what brightness of the New—need scarce be told. The trial of their faith and love is over. Obedient to the victory call, out of the depths that have so long surrounded them, the future, star-crowned, rises up at last.

THE END

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